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STORM-DRIVEN.

BY

MARY HEALY,

AUTHOR OF "LAKEVILLE," "A SUMMER'S ROMANCE," "OUT
OF THE WORLD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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STORM-DRIVEN.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN.

JOHN BRUCE was in a fair way of becoming a popular man. His portrait of the American Minister, which Lil had seen in his studio, had a great success; he awoke one morning to find himself, if not famous, at least on the road to fame. He had painted other portraits before this one, as remarkable perhaps, but they had passed unnoticed. Why one thing succeeds rather than another, is often a great


puzzle ; it requires sometimes very little to produce success : a dearth of other interests, a sudden fancy of some one to whom others listen,—and the thing is done. For years, John had struggled on, bearing his poverty very bravely ; he was blessed with a buoyant, hopeful spirit, blessed also with simple tastes, and a great love of work. Now he suddenly found that his days of privation were over. It was a pleasant surprise, but it was a surprise.

There was another person to whom this success seemed even more surprising than to John himself ; this was his sister, Mrs. Crayton, otherwise Madge. She was a superior woman, or, at least, had always considered herself as such ; in that capacity, when she was still quite a young girl, she had governed her mother and brother ; when the former died, and the latter was

sent to Europe to study, she had turned her governing powers to good use in her own household; she married a man who meekly lived under her rule, and who, in time, meekly died under it. The only being whom she did not rule was her son, Archibald, who, perhaps on account of his fine name, had a spirit of his own. When her brother was on the point of returning to France, she informed him that she meant to go and keep house for him. John, weary of restaurant dinners and forlorn rooms, consented willingly enough. He had not seen much of Madge since his boyhood, and being of an imprudently sanguine nature, saw nothing alarming in the arrangement.


Mrs. Crayton was really fond of him, with a compassionate sort of fondness; she had always thought him a little wanting in

common sense—a quality of which she believed herself to have a double share; she also had a secret contempt for a man who could spend all his energies in covering canvas with dabs of paint; it was an effeminate sort of occupation, fit, at the best, for a pastime. John's love for his art was a thing to be pardoned by people of superior intelligence,—and she kindly did pardon it. She always associated the idea of art with attics, scanty meals, and threadbare clothes; therefore to choose to be an artist was, in her eyes, an act of folly. Her husband, who had certainly not been a man of great intelligence, had amassed a snug little fortune in the wholesale boot and shoe trade. People all needed boots and shoes, but they could get through life very comfortably without having their portraits painted; consequently Mr. Crayton had,



in reality, in his choice of an occupation, shown more discrimination and good sense than her brother. When, therefore, several persons of social importance in the American colony gave John commissions, when it became quite an ordinary thing to see fine carriages drive into the dingy courtyard, when invitations to dinners and to evening parties for Mr. Bruce became frequent, Mrs. Crayton, without acknowledging that she had been wrong in her judgment,—she never did acknowledge such errors,—began to realize the fact of John's extraordinary success, and to conceive something more of respect for him, in consequence.

Perhaps, if John had taken the trouble to study his sister's character more closely, he would not have rejoiced quite so much at finding an apartment joining the painting-



room, but he was too much engrossed in his work to study it. There was great comfort in eating his meals well served, in having a comfortable sitting-room, wherein to pass his evenings ; besides, Madge at this time spent most of her superfluous energy in trying to reduce their "bonne," who barely understood her mistress's eccentric French, to abject submission ; this had rendered her less domineering with her brother than she would perhaps have been otherwise.

One morning the two sat at table ; there was an ominous cloud on Mrs. Madge's face.

"Do you really mean to buy those rags, John ?"

The rags in question were bits of rare old drapery ; such things were John's one great extravagance. He looked up a little astonished ; the tone was an aggressive one.

"Rags? Oh! my draperies! yes, of course; I absolutely need them."

"But they cost a ridiculous price."


"I know; they certainly are dear."

"And they are dingy, darned, and dirty," continued Mrs. Crayton.

"You mean, deliciously toned down by time."

"How absurd! you never had much common sense, John; who but you would think of spending so much money on rubbish, when there is not so much as a silver teapot in the place! no household that respects itself, can do without a silver teapot."

"My dear Madge," said her brother, quite roused this time and much amused likewise; "do you think that it is your vocation in life to tell me what I need in my painting-room, as well as what is neces-



sary in my wardrobe? Your suggestion about my shirts was excellent, and I obediently followed it; but I cannot accept your supremacy in my studio."

There is no knowing what Mrs. Crayton would have answered, had not the noise of a discussion in the antechamber turned her attention in that direction. A clear, shrill voice was answering the French servant's remonstrances thus:—

"My good woman, when this part of the world is civilized enough to adopt English as its language, I shall then be able to understand you. You want to keep me from going in, I suppose, but I cannot be kept back by you;" then the door was thrown open, and Issy Richards calmly walked in.

"Here I am," she exclaimed.

Mrs. Crayton knew Issy but very slightly, and as she had a lively sense of her dignity,

this abrupt invasion displeased her. The young girl, ignoring that displeasure with great composure, shook hands with her, and then turned to John, who welcomed her warmly. She looked exactly as though she had left her mother's house five minutes before ; nothing seemed capable of astonishing or frightening her ; she had accomplished the long voyage without a tremor, she had found herself among a strange people, speaking a strange tongue, without any particular emotion ; she merely felt a certain contempt for human beings who did not understand English.


“ How did you get along travelling alone, as you have done ? ” asked John, when he had made her sit down and partake of the beefsteak.

“ Perfectly well. The great thing is not to look flurried. I never am flurried, there-

fore I am treated with respect; a respect mingled with astonishment I own, but that matters little. What a good idea Lil Temple had to speak about me to the old art-amateur! some one said she was going to marry him, is it true? Lil is not half a bad girl after all! I think I won her over by telling her some plain truths, and so rousing her up; you know there are women who adore their husbands because they beat them. Where is she?"

"Gone to Italy with Mrs. Cox—at least, that is what I heard at the hotel when I inquired."

"I would rather have stayed in Lakeville all the days of my life, than have accepted the position of a paid companion to a fine lady. But that is none of my business, and it has all turned out for the best since it is through her that I am here.



Now, Mr. Bruce," she said, pushing her plate from her, "now that I have come, what are you going to do with me?"

"First of all, my sister will be delighted to have you stay with us a few days, while we settle matters; we have a spare room."

"Thank you, Mrs. Crayton," blandly said Issy, not choosing to notice the lady's austere demeanour.

"Then," pursued John, "you must board in a French family so as to learn the language as quickly as possible, I have already one in view; I have also spoken to one of the best masters having a studio for pupils, in your behalf."

"That is kind of you. Is it true—is it really true that I, Issy Richards, am here? Oh! how I am going to work!" She said this with such genuine fervour that it was impossible to judge her harshly; even Mrs.

Crayton, who disapproved of painters in general, of female painters in particular; who disapproved still more of girls who ought to be in the school-room, running about the world without a tremor of fear; who disapproved most of all of having guests thrust upon her by her brother—even she was mollified.

They took her to the painting-room. It was the largest and finest she had ever seen, and she revelled in it; she delighted in the tapestries which hung about the wall, in the armour, in the old vases, in all the odds-and-ends by which artists turn four walls into a picturesque mass of colour. She went here and there, examining each article, stopping before the finished and unfinished pictures; talking, laughing, criticizing—as much at home as though John

and all his belongings had been her especial property.

“You have made progress—yes! decidedly, you paint better than you did; more firmly, you are surer of yourself,” then she stopped some time before the unfinished portrait of a lady. “I am not satisfied with this, however.”

“Why not?” asked John, much amused.

“I have never seen your sitter; but I am sure that you have flattered her.”


“Of course he has,” said Mrs. Crayton, “and it is the only sensible thing he has done for some time past; the woman is vain, she would not take and pay for the portrait if it were not flattered—and what would be the use of painting people, if one were not paid for it? I heard her myself say, ‘Mr. Bruce, I do not care if you paint a likeness or not, but what I do care for is

that you should make me handsome. I want my grandchildren to say, 'What a pretty woman she was!' If I were John, I would make the eyes still larger, and the mouth still smaller."

"You would have him false to his principles, then? What I like in his painting is, that it is usually so very honest. If I were to have a sitter who had a mole on his nose I should paint the mole, and if it had a tuft of little hairs growing out of it, I should paint the tuft as well."

Mrs. Crayton inwardly hoped that the French family might soon be able to receive its inmate; still, she was mistress enough of herself to treat Issy, if not with cordiality, at least with politeness. As to the young girl, she was in no particular hurry to begin her French studies; John was very busy at this time, and she begged

so hard to be allowed to help him, that he set her to work on backgrounds and draperies : she followed his directions very exactly, and painted with such zeal that the result was most satisfactory. It was very pleasant in that well-warmed studio ; when there were no sitters, as they worked side by side, John would whistle softly to himself when his painting was going on well, and somehow Issy thought that whistling the perfection of music. She wished John had consented to take her as a pupil, instead of sending her to an "atelier" where a number of women worked together under a high and mighty master ; she wished things might remain as they were.



CHAPTER II.

NIGHT TERRORS.

SEVERAL of the passers-by looked curiously at Lil, as she stood stunned by her discovery ; one even, a good-humoured-looking woman, carrying a heavy market-basket, stopped and asked if she were ill.

“ Ill ? ” said Lil, looking at the woman with a dazed expression ; “ No, I am not ill.” Then she saw that she had attracted the attention of several people, and making a strong effort to shake off a dizziness which had seized her, she hurried on.

She had been robbed ; she was alone in a great, strange city ; she would soon be penniless. What was to become of her ? She was frightened ; she looked about her as a lost traveller in a desert might look, seeking in vain for some sign of a life-giving spring in all the dreary expanse about him. She had heard stories of people dying of hunger in crowded towns ; it must be dreadful to die of hunger ! she shuddered as the thought crossed her mind. All that remained to her in the world was the change the conductor had given her ; this she had found safe in her outside pocket. A week's rent would be due the next day, that she must pay at any rate ; she must at least have a place wherein to hide her misery.

Why had she said in her despatch that she could wait three weeks ? Three weeks !

She must try and secure some work, enough to keep her alive during that time; how or where she could not tell, but surely something must be found! It seemed a very long time now since she rebelled at the thought of work that was not genteel. She caught herself watching a street-sweeper, and wondering whether she should have strength enough to do what he did.

As she neared the house, her heart beat violently; she was afraid to see the portress; she had an absurd idea that the coarse, shrewd woman would guess from her pale face that she was almost penniless, and she knew well, that to be penniless was, in Madame Bonassieu's eyes, the worst of crimes.

Everything was quiet in the little entry, and she slipped in swiftly and noiselessly. She longed to shut herself in her poor

room, as some hunted animal seeks its hole. The six stories were hard to mount thus rapidly, and she felt that she was in reality very weak ; she went on, however, as though she had been pursued. Once in the passage leading to her room, she felt safe, and, quite out of breath, she dragged herself along wearily. The door of the attic next to hers was open ; it was that of the old man, whom the portress despised because he had no friends, and because he only burned five francs' worth of wood in a whole winter. Mechanically, she glanced in as she passed ; then suddenly she stopped, leaning against the wall for support. The old man was seated facing the open door ; his head was against the back of the chair, his lower jaw had fallen, and the eyes stared, wide open, in glassy immovability. Lil knew that he was dead ;

she was horribly fascinated by those dead eyes that fixed her own. She wanted to scream, but she had no strength left to utter a sound. Just then, one of the servants of the house came towards her.

“Well!” exclaimed the young woman; “what is the matter with the ‘Anglaise’?”

Lil pointed to the dead man; the girl screamed lustily, and rushed downstairs, calling for help. Then Lil slipped into her own room, closing the door after her.

The servant, glad perhaps of the importance which such a piece of news gave her, said nothing about Lil, so that she was left undisturbed; but the wall was so thin that she heard everything that went on. All Madame Bonassieu’s comments; the doctor’s verdict of sudden death from natural causes; the man of law who came to “constater le décès;” the procession of

curious idlers, who came to look at the corpse. Then followed the search among the poor belongings, for some clue to friends or relations ; nothing of the sort was found.

“The man had not so much as a relative who might be made responsible even for funeral expenses—look ! just seven francs in this drawer, Monsieur le Commissaire, you see. Oh ! I am too soft-hearted ! I should not have kept him, a man whose very name one does not know—Monsieur Philippe—that is no name ! Philippe what ? Philippe who ? Where did he go every month for the pittance which just sufficed to keep him alive ? dear knows ! I followed him once, but he saw me, I suppose, for he led me such a tramp that it makes me quite hot when I think of it. A charity funeral from my door—it is humiliating !”


By-and-by, some of the men took the body to lay it on the bed for the night ; in the morning, the coffin provided by the proper authorities was to be brought. Little by little the noise ceased ; public curiosity was appeased ; Madame Bonassieu finally locked the door with a sharp click, and went away.

It was already dark when all noise ceased, and Lil lit her candle. She had sat quite still during the whole time, fearing to move, lest her presence should be discovered, and she should be questioned.

There was some bread left from the morning ; she tried to eat it, but she found she could not, so she put it away again and sat down, trying hard not to think of the dead man who lay so near to her.

She tried to busy herself ; she began looking over her small possessions, so as to see what could be sold, in case she found no means of earning money. There was not much, her wardrobe was limited, and most of the articles half-worn out, and she had absolutely no trinkets. The survey was altogether not encouraging ; there was, however, a black silk dress which was still tolerably fresh. All this did not take her long, and once more she sat down and stared at her flaring candle.

Time wore on. There were the usual noises : people coming up to bed, servant-girls chattering and laughing together ; all this was a little more subdued than usual, for death inspires a certain awe and respect, even in common natures. Madame Bonassieu came up once, and Lil looked nervously at her lock ; but the




steps went past her room. She thought she heard some noise in the one to her right, but she was not sure. Gradually silence was established; night had come.

Generally, Lil was only too glad to forget her miseries in sleep, but she could not now make up her mind to go to bed. She knew that by the disposition of the furniture, the dead man lay close to the thin partition against which stood her own bed. She tried to remove it, but the creaking of the old wooden frame frightened her, and sent her trembling back to her chair. The slightest noise made her start; she shuddered as she listened to the moaning of the wind, to the crackling night-noises of old timbers, or furniture; noises, which in the daytime no one hears, and which at night are full of fantastic terrors. She tried to reason

with herself, but in vain ; all the painful excitements of the day had worked on her nerves, and no amount of resolution on her part could succeed in quieting them.


In her thoughts, which went and came uncontrolled, her own position, her friendlessness, mingled with the story of the man who lay dead close to her. It was possible, then, to die in a city, in the midst of a busy crowd, unknown ; to drop away unmissed, without so much as an acquaintance to come and say, "This man was called thus ; he once had a family, he was once loved, there were hopes founded on his future." To disappear from the face of the earth, having for all lament, the grumblings of a Madame Bonassieu who found it humiliating to have a pauper's funeral start from her door ! If she were to die suddenly, would she also have a



pauper's funeral? There was no one to come and claim her; Martha might never know of her fate. Then she found that she was counting up the little money that remained to her, wondering whether it would suffice; with the sale of her clothes, to pay for the cheapest sort of funeral. In her morbid state of mind, the idea that she might have to be thrown into the paupers' common grave, oppressed her with a shrinking horror. Her pulses were going rapidly, and the flame of her tallow candle looked red to her blood-shot eyes. Then she began once more to wonder who and what this poor unknown wretch had been. The mystery fascinated her; there had been nothing but what was very common about this man; she remembered his shambling gait, the meek downward bend of his grey head; he had fought

with life and had been worsted, that was all! Perhaps there was some shame in the past, which caused him to hide himself, never even giving his real name. For years past, probably, he had been waiting for death in a dull expectancy, and now death had come. She saw him so vividly at that moment, as she had seen him some hours before, with his glassy eyes fixed on hers, that she put her hand to her mouth to repress a scream of terror.

The hours wore on in this way; the candle was almost burned to the socket; she remembered with a start that she had no other. The thought of remaining in the dark made her tremble violently. Oh, if she could only speak to some living being, if she were not quite alone,—a desolate creature, forgotten, in the solitude of a strange city! Why had she



ever left Martha? A great yearning towards that sister, that one being who loved her, seized upon the unhappy girl; the tears which she had kept back all this time, now fell abundantly; sobs which she did her best to stifle, shook her. Through her tears, she saw the burnt out candle flicker—no! no! she could not remain in the dark! she was afraid of the dead man, she was mortally afraid of him! her blood coursed madly in her veins; she was losing all self-control, a little more and she would have screamed aloud—as it was, the hysterical sobs grew louder and louder.

Then, suddenly she heard knocking on the wall; she sprang to her feet with a cry.

“What is the matter?” called out a voice.


There was nothing supernatural in this voice; it came from the room which, since Lil's arrival, had been tenantless; she went up to the wall, and as the question was repeated, she answered through her sobs,—

“I am afraid—I am so much afraid! and my light is going out.”

“Is that all? just wait a moment!”

Presently Lil heard a fumbling at her door, she opened it, and a young woman in a night-dress, and a shawl thrown about her, entered carrying a light.

Mademoiselle Finette, of the Porte St. Martin—for it was she—was not exactly a pretty person; she had rather indifferent features, and a doubtful complexion, but her eyes were bright, and there was an expression of good-nature in her mobile countenance. She looked about her curiously, with that quick glance peculiar



to those accustomed to see all sorts of people, and to judge them by exterior circumstances. Mademoiselle Finette was not often astonished, but there was something in Lil's appearance which puzzled her.

"You are good to come to me," said the frightened girl, going up close to her new protectress.

"Good? I do not know—you woke me, and I was curious to see why you were crying. What frightened you?"

Lil did not answer, but looked uneasily towards the room to her left.


"Oh, it's poor Père Philippe! well, he certainly never frightened any one before. If ever he had a wife, I am sure she beat him. You actually look ill; what a child it is! Why, I thought you English eat too much underdone beef to have nerves."

"If it were only daytime!" Lil said, trying hard to keep back her tears, and to look brave.

"But it will not be daytime for two or three hours to come yet; meanwhile, you cannot stay here, or you would go into convulsions or something of the kind. You must come into my room; I have had a good sleep already, and you can have my bed."

But this Lil would not hear of; she begged to be allowed to pass the rest of the night on a chair in Mademoiselle Finette's room.

"Nonsense!" said that energetic young woman. "You will be overcome with fatigue as soon as you have recovered from your fright; you need sleep. Come! help me;" and she began pulling the bed to pieces. In a few minutes the mattress



was on the floor in her room, and a bed improvised. Half an hour later, Lil, worn out in mind and body, slept profoundly; and everything fell once more into the night silence.



CHAPTER III.

MADEMOISELLE FINETTE.

It was late when Lil awoke; she looked about her, unable at first to understand where she was. Mademoiselle Finette laughed aloud at her astonishment: this young person was examining Lil's clothes with great attention and evident approbation, and was in no way disconcerted at being caught in the act.

"You must be a real lady, you! Where did you get these things made?"

"At home—in America."

"Bah! what is it like, America? Do

you live in real houses, and are there omnibuses in the streets? Here! put on your clothes; I have to go out presently, and I have loads of questions to ask you."

Lil obeyed; and, in very truth, Finette's questions were poured out incessantly; but she did not often wait for the answer.

"How on earth did you come to fall in Mère Bonassieu's clutches? That room is no place for you! have you no friends? You are not an actress—pray, what are you?"

Lil, in as few words as possible told her story, omitting many details. Her voice trembled when she told of the robbery in the omnibus; she showed the slit in her overskirt as proof of what she was saying.

"It is just like a story," exclaimed Finette, who was greatly enjoying herself;

“only, you know, there are many people who would not believe a word of it.”

“Do not you?” asked Lil distressed.

“I? yes, of course I do! But I read faces, and your’s is not a lying one. But tell me—you have plenty of your country-people here in Paris; people whom you must know, why did you not go to them, instead of hiding yourself in such a hole as this?”

“Because—” then Lil stopped short and blushed.

“Well! because of what?”

“Because they all think that I was sent away on account of a grave fault.”

“Ah! we are coming to it at last! There is a man in the case, of course. I knew there must be; your story was like soup without salt.” Then, as Lil did not speak, she exclaimed, “Out with it! you

can say anything before me, you know I'm no 'légueule.'"

"I do not understand."

"I do not consider Mo'sieur le Maire as an indispensable personage." Then, as she saw Lil look more and more puzzled, she burst into a hearty laugh, "Come, you had better confide in me; I will give you plenty of good advice, since I have not much beside to offer you."

"There was a gentleman who, when I was rich, seemed to care for me; we met again here, and in secret he continued his attentions to me."

"Naturally."

"He tried to persuade me to marry him clandestinely."

"And your fine lady disapproved of the love-making? she must be very stiff-necked! Is he still in Paris?"

“I believe so.”

“Then it is his bounden duty to provide for you.”

“I would rather starve than eat a morsel of his bread! If—if ever I cared for him, that is past now, entirely past; all I ask is never to see him again. But let us speak of other things; tell me how I can find a little work, enough to keep me alive, until I can get news from home.”

“Work! To tell the truth, I do not know much about such things; but, tush! a pretty girl like you need never starve!”

“I do not see that good looks ever help one to get along in the world; it would be more to the purpose if I knew how to sew exquisitely.”

Mademoiselle Finette looked curiously at Lil; then, suddenly—a thing which had

not happened to her for ten years—she blushed.

“Come,” she said, getting up briskly, “I am hungry ; are you not ? You finish dressing, and I shall be back in no time, with our provisions. I have money enough for that at least. I invite you to déjeuner, mademoiselle,” she said with mock gravity ; and before Lil could answer, she had danced out of the room.

Lil could not help wondering at her own mad terror of the night before, as she put her room to rights and let in the mid-day sun. The desolation of her situation seemed less absolute now ; after all, Martha might be able to send the money at once, this was indeed very likely ; then all her fears would prove vain. Madame Bonassieu was in poor M. Philippe’s vacant room. The funeral had taken place

already; and she was sweeping and dusting with the energy of a proprietor eager for a new tenant. Presently she knocked at Lil's door, and asked with suspicion in her voice for the week's rent. She was mollified when Lil, with nervous haste, handed her the sum.

There remained but little after that.

"So it seems you were frightened, last night?" said the woman who, being paid, was inclined to be loquacious.

"Yes," confessed Lil meekly.

"Mademoiselle Finette has quite taken you under her protection; a very witch, that Finette! she owes me for two months rent; and,—will you believe it?—I cannot find the heart even to remind her of it. She says she will get us into the theatre this evening: one of the box-openers is her friend. Céleste adores Mademoiselle

Finette. But what a scatterbrain it is! no order—no order whatever; she is always getting into trouble; and then she is forced to come back to her refuge, to ‘la mère Bonassieu.’”

Lil wondered why her new friend should be always in trouble. She knew in a vague way that the world to which she belonged was not usually a world of very strict morals; but in her eyes, want of morality was a thing so hideous, that good-nature and kindness could not by any possibility go hand-in-hand with it; and Mademoiselle Finette had proved herself quite capable of compassion.

She had not much leisure for these reflections, for the young “figurante” returned, carrying a loaf, two artichokes ready cooked, and a paper of shrimps.

“If that is not a feast, I don’t know



what is ! I adore artichokes with plenty of vinegar in the sauce ! I stole a little oil and vinegar from the “vieille,” she will never guess it ; and I have a bottle of wine still in the closet.”

“You are very good ; why should you give me part of your meal ? I am nothing to you.” To tell the truth, Lil was horribly hungry, and in spite of her protest, she eyed the preparations with great interest.

“Tush ! you shall invite me to dinner if you like, and then we shall be quits. No doubt you will find some work before evening ; if not we will sell something, and live on bread and onions till better times. What of that ? I have seen many a tighter squeeze than this. I prefer chickens stuffed with truffles to boiled beef ; but one can live on boiled beef never-

theless, and even on dry bread, for the matter of that."

"Do you earn much at the theatre?"


"Bless you, no; it's not worth speaking of."

"Then I could not earn my living in that way?" asked Lil rather timidly; she had acted in private theatricals with success.

"You? Oh, dear no! that is not work for you; you must try and find some sewing to do, or something of the sort."


"How did you come to be an actress?"

"I? Oh! that's very different. My mother was 'figurante' too, when she was young, and she was 'ouvreuse' before she died. I was born in that world and have lived always in it; it never struck me that I could ever belong to any other; and in very fact, you know, I could not;



the other worlds would have nothing to say to me! I don't complain, mind; it must be a horrible bore to be servant, or laundress, or anything of the sort. I suppose when I grow old I shall be 'ouvreuse,' like my mother, or keep a second-hand shop and rob other young women, as I am robbed when I am forced to sell. Perhaps I shall die at the hospital before that, however," and she shuddered a little. "But how stupid to think of such things! here, drink a little wine, water is bad for the stomach."

Finette talked on in her rapid, jerky way; so rapidly indeed that sometimes Lil barely understood her; but with all her apparent recklessness, she forbore with instinctive delicacy to use any expressions which might in any way shock the young stranger. As to the details of her own




affairs also, she was very reticent. All was not bad in Mademoiselle Finette.

“Could you not go with me,” said Lil to her new friend, who after frizzing and puffing out her hair in a wonderful way, was buttoning a pair of very high-heeled boots, “and help me to find some work? People may mistrust me if I, a foreigner, am alone.”

“They would mistrust you much more, if I were with you, my child,” laughed Mademoiselle Finette; “think of what a recommendation mine would be! I who every evening delight the public, dressed in a few feathers or in a little gauze.”

“But one does not carry one’s profession written on one’s face.”


“No; not exactly on one’s face, but a little everywhere,” said the “figurante,” as she looked at herself with a certain appro-



bation; she was dainty-looking enough, without being really pretty, but she was much too showily and cheaply dressed.

Lil did not press her request.

There was a foretaste of spring in the air, that afternoon; all Paris was out of doors, the fine weather seemed to give life and joy to all, almost every woman looked pretty, almost every child was laughing; everywhere there was hope,—everywhere, except among the miserable poor, among the old women crouching in doorways, holding out a poor assortment of tapes and needles in their trembling hands; among the blind, the misshapen, to whom all seasons are alike, seasons of hopelessness. But the busy crowd had no time to think of these; it hurried along the broad, sun-flooded streets and avenues, rejoicing in the tall white houses, the magnificent plate-



glass shop windows, where dazzling jewels, beautiful silks and velvets of contrasting colours, or ribbons and laces, or eccentric costumes on lay-figures, caught the eye and forced many a pretty woman to slacken her pace, or to stop altogether. Lil was hurried on with the others; she had reached the fashionable part of the bright city; the broad sidewalks, with their fine trees, alternating with benches and newspaper stalls, were crowded, and she felt alone in the crowd. Her purpose of seeking work seemed more impossible of realization than ever; who would ever find time to attend to her? She met several old acquaintances, and they pretended not to see her; she felt chilled, and her heart failed her. As she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror, she fancied she saw all her miseries in her outward appearance; there was an

anxious, hunted look in her face, a shrunken air about her dress on which the rain of many days had fallen. Who would trust her, unprotected and unrecommended as she was? Yet she must try. She passed a fine large establishment, where a whole dainty "trousseau" was displayed; among the laces and embroideries, she made out the initials—those of a bride doubtless—they happened to be her own. She wondered whether the rich girl for whom all those pretty things were intended, was happy; whether the marriage she was about to make was a love-match, or whether it was an arranged affair; whether she was pretty and young. She would never guess that another girl, of her own age most likely, had stood looking at her "trousseau;" a girl who had seemed once destined to be happy, and who now had a few little silver pieces

between herself and starvation. Lil shuddered; she would not attempt to go in there and ask for work. Yet time was going on; she must gather up her courage, for it would not do to go back to her poor room without at least having made an attempt. She stopped before another "magasin de blanc" in a quieter street, and without giving herself time to reflect as to what she should say, went in. There were several customers at the different counters, and at first no one attended to her. At last a young woman came forward, and politely desired to know what "madame" wished to look at.

"May I see the mistress of the establishment?" Lil asked, unable to keep her voice from trembling.

The young person stared at her a moment, then went up to a stout middle-

aged woman, carefully dressed, and who was talking to a lady. Lil was told to sit down a moment, and that she should be attended to presently.

“What can I do for you?” said the stout lady, when she had finished her gossip with her customer. Lil looked at the woman, and saw that she seemed shrewd but not ill-natured. She had not meant to speak about herself, but simply to ask for work; but on the impulse of the moment she said in a low voice,—

“Madame, I am a stranger. I have been left alone in Paris through a dreadful mistake; I was robbed of my money; I can get none from home for two or three weeks, and if I cannot find some work, I must starve. Give me some, pay me just enough to enable me to buy bread; that is all I ask.”

“What recommendation can you give?”

“None. I know no one here to whom I could apply.”

“That is strange. You are English?”

“I am American.”

“Oh! I have many of your country-women among my customers. You seem to belong to the same class as they,” and she looked at the young girl searchingly. “What is your name? I might write to some of these ladies about you.”

“That would be useless,” said Lil, blushing deeply as she remembered the little scene at the banker’s, and the marked avoidance of the people she had met in the street.

“I am sorry; I have a weakness for Americans, but you understand that I cannot employ a person about whom I know nothing, and—pardon me!—whose

story does not appear to me quite complete. If you knew how many applications of the kind I have almost daily ! ”

“ Try me. I will work for almost nothing,” said poor Lil, trying hard to keep back the tears that filled her eyes.

“ I have no place here for you, and how can I trust my delicate materials out of the house ? Besides, I do not know what you can do ; you might spoil what I gave you. Things cannot be arranged in this off-hand, unbusiness-like manner. With a new hand this is what I do : I place her with one of my experienced workwomen as apprentice for a month at least ; at first she generally works for nothing, then little by little, according to her capacity, she is paid. You must understand that what you ask is im-

possible." She was not unkind; she was even sorry, but no entreaties on Lil's part could change her determination.

After this, Lil went into every establishment of the sort which she could find; the same answer awaited her everywhere, varying only in form; sometimes, however she was dismissed at the first word, with the excuse that there were more workers than were needed.

Towards evening she went back to the house, utterly disheartened, yet almost too much worn out fully to realize the hopelessness of her position. The portress stopped her to say that she was not to expect Mademoiselle Finette, as she had gone to spend the night with one of her fellow-actresses, who was going to "pendre la crémaillère." What that


meant Lil had not the slightest idea; but she understood, at any rate, that her new neighbour would not be back till the next day.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OUTCAST.

IN the midst of her desolate loneliness, Lil longed greatly for some news from home. A letter from Martha at this time would have given her new life and courage; she had had none since the one in which her sister told her of her change of position, of her meeting with her old admirer. During the long dull hours when she could take her thoughts away from her own miseries, Lil would picture to herself all Martha's doings, her brisk activity, her cheerfulness; then she would wonder what sort

of a man Mr. Kirkland really was, and naturally she arranged a little romance for Martha ending, as all romances should, with orange-blossoms and marriage bells. But these were but imaginings, she knew nothing of what was going on, she was cut off from all living interests, she was a creature put aside and forgotten. At last, the longing for news became so imperative, that in spite of the resolution she had taken, never again to venture where she was likely to meet Americans, she determined to go once more to the bank. It is true, she had received the promise that any letters for her should be sent to the address she had given ; but bankers' clerks are often negligent, especially with regard to poor nobodies like herself ; so, choosing an early hour, when she was not likely to meet many people, she once



more swung back the baize door, and went quickly up to the young man who had already attended to her.

No, there was no letter for her; yet he did remember that one or two, by mistake, being directed to the care of Mrs. Cox, had been sent on with that lady's correspondence. They had no news yet from Mrs. Cox; all her letters had been sent to the banker in Florence. Of course any others which might arrive for Miss Temple, should be put aside for her. Lil turned away, a dull disappointment weighing on her heart. At that moment, she saw a lady who had come in just after her; she was an American, who had lived in Paris for many years. Lil had known her, and had rather liked her; she was a sensible woman, and much esteemed in the American circle. She saw Lil, changed

colour a little, but bowed as she passed on. Lil stood undecided a moment, then she went up quickly to the lady and said,—

“Mrs. Paige, will you allow me to say a few words to you? I shall not keep you long.”

Mrs. Paige involuntarily glanced about her, then, as though ashamed of her hesitation, she said with grave politeness,—

“Certainly, Miss Temple,” and led the way to a corner of the office, away from the clerks and the groups of people straggling in. When Lil attempted to speak, she found great difficulty in doing so; there was a choking sensation in her throat. Mrs. Paige waited patiently, but did not offer to help her.

“I am very desolate!” Lil at last said. “I have been left alone here without friends, without money.”

"I beg your pardon, Miss Temple; but Mrs. Cox, who wrote to me on the subject, explaining her reasons for—for dismissing you, assured me that she had left you amply supplied with money."

Lil told her of the theft in the omnibus, but she saw that she was not listened to with any sympathy; she grew more and more embarrassed, so much so indeed that Mrs. Paige's evident incredulity was justified. At last the young girl exclaimed, changing her tone,—

"But you do not believe me, and you think me guilty of a fault of which, God knows! I am innocent. All that I am telling you, seems like an arranged story."

"You may be innocent of that first fault; but you must own that circumstances are strangely against you."

“ Yet, believe me,—pray believe me, when I tell you that I am in reality innocent.”

“ At any rate, you were most imprudent in allowing a man of Mr. Ward’s known character to pay his court to you. But let me know what I can do for you; I have not much time to spare.”

“ Help me to find some work, which will keep me from starving till I can get money from America; with your recommendation I could, I think, find some sewing to do.”

“ How can I recommend you? besides, I am told that you have taken a room in a place where no honest young woman should lodge.”

“ I did not know; how should I?”

Mrs. Paige reflected a moment, then she said,—

“I am very sorry, Miss Temple, but I cannot do what you wish. Your story, unfortunately, is too well known; it is impossible for me, in my position, to introduce into any house or establishment, a young person of—doubtful antecedents.”

“And even if I were guilty,” said Lil in a low, trembling voice, “what sort of Christian charity is this which would bar the road to honest work? I do not ask to be introduced into your family, or into any other, where there are girls not more guiltless than I am; all I ask is a little help to enable me to sew for the shops, and that help you refuse me, you, who are naturally good.”

“There are many women who apply to me as you are doing, and who have nothing in their past which tells against them; I must give the preference to these;” and with a

slight bend of the head Mrs. Paige turned away, but she came back almost immediately holding a gold-piece in her hand. "I am not rich, but if this can help you, you are welcome to it."

Lil glanced at the money, she knew that with it she could live several days; but she was too much wounded and hurt to see the real kindness which prompted the act. She drew herself up, blushing deeply,—

"Thank you," she said, "I cannot accept alms;" and she turned away.

So, all doors were closed against her, ruthlessly; she was an outcast: a great bitterness filled the poor girl's heart. She was very ignorant of evil, but not so much so as not to understand the full meaning of Mrs. Paige's words. Her reputation was tainted, she was classed among those

women whom one avoids seeing, or speaking about; yet she had done no wrong. And he? Leigh Ward, who to amuse his idleness had compromised her—he, who knew what he was doing, would he also be treated with like severity? Would even Mrs. Paige, who was a good woman,—would she close her doors on him? She had known what he really was, for she had spoken of him as of a man whose want of principles was a known thing, yet she had received him at her house; Lil herself had seen him dancing with her daughters. This was the world's justice; it was a convenient weapon made to strike down the weak, and to respect the strong. She did not understand it all; she was weary, ready to give up the unequal struggle. Even the thought of returning to her sister frightened her now; the story of her


disgrace would inevitably precede her, and ought she to inflict the humiliations which would be sure to follow, on Martha? She wished she could die—she who was so useless on earth, she, whose life was a failure.

Aimlessly and hopelessly she wandered here and there; the streets were as crowded as usual, she was pushed and hurried on with the rest. Thousands and thousands of human beings swarmed in this bright and beautiful city, and of all these, there was not one to whom she could apply for help or comfort.

At last she grew faint with fatigue and hunger; she had taken but a little bread in the morning, and though for a long time mental misery kept her from feeling hunger, her healthy young constitution asserted its rights, and she longed for

some food. She smiled a little bitterly, when she found that all her sorrows, all her anger against society, all her contempt for Leigh Ward, all the wonder she felt at having once loved him, all the troubled thoughts which these different feelings had engendered,—were forgotten in the contemplation of some little loaves in a baker's shop. Her funds were very low indeed; she must try and sell something. Often during these past days she had looked in at certain shops where second-hand articles,—articles of every description from bronzes to half-worn satin slippers—were displayed for sale. She carried a little grey muff of no great value certainly, but fresh and neat; this should be the first object sacrificed.

Lil hesitated some time, looking in at the window of one of these establishments. She



feared that she might in some way be treated like a sort of genteel beggar. She stood there apparently examining some cheap jewellery displayed in blue velvet cases, as though the glitter of the stones fascinated her. At last she went in: a stout, unpleasant-looking woman, dressed with no small pretensions to elegance, sat at the counter; she greeted Lil with an oily smile, seeing in her a customer.

“ You want to know the price of that bracelet, madame; I saw you examining it with great care,—such a bargain! I got it from an actress in distress, and I will let you have it at a ridiculously low price; the stones are real—warranted, you know!” and she held out the trinket so as to show it to the best advantage, talking so rapidly all the time, that Lil could not at first make her understand what she really

wanted ; finally she said more decidedly,—
“No, you are mistaken ; I have not come to buy anything ; but I understand that you purchase second-hand articles. What will you give me for this muff ? It is almost new.”

“Oh, is that it ? As to muffs, ‘ma belle,’ I have more than I know what to do with. Winter is nearly over, and no one buys furs now.”

“You will not take it ?” asked Lil, greatly disappointed.

“Not I !”

At that moment a well-dressed man, who had entered just after Lil—who indeed had followed her, coughed, and made a sign to the woman, whose tone immediately changed. “That is—we shall see ; perhaps, after all, we may come to terms. Sit down a moment, this gentleman wants to see my

bronzes, he has already been to cheapen them more than once," and she bustled off to her new customer. Lil sat down patiently; she was becoming accustomed to be treated without much consideration. Mechanically she looked out towards the street, then started back nervously. Looking in, probably attracted by a small picture half-hidden among the laces and old fans, was John Bruce; there, close to her, was relief from all her miseries. John was a friend, he would take care of her and let her want for nothing; she could trust herself to him, he was honour itself. She half rose, then sank down again, hiding her face in her hands. He also had doubtless heard the story which, as Mrs. Paige had told her, was known to all; this was hard to bear! he had never said a word of love to her, it is true, but she guessed that he had

once cared for her, that he had dreamed of making her his wife ; even in the days of her folly, she had been grateful for that silent, respectful affection, and now, the thought that she had fallen in his esteem was insupportable. When she looked up, he was just turning away, she watched him go ; it was all over, she would not know where to find him even if, in the extremity of her distress, she should wish to do so.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts, that she had almost forgotten where she was, when the mistress of the establishment came back, smiling blandly.


“ Ma petite dame,” she said with odious familiarity, “ it is true that this is not the season to buy such articles, and you know that, after all, business is business ; but I am glad to be able to serve you indirectly : monsieur here is in search of just such a

muff as a present to a little cousin of his; he will buy it if you like, he offers you forty francs—you had better accept, it is a good price.”

Forty francs was more than the muff had cost originally; Lil looked up astonished, then in the well-dressed person, who now stood near her by the counter, she recognized the man who had once so frightened her by accosting her in the street.

“Oh, no! no!” she exclaimed, growing pale with fear; and, snatching up her muff, she almost ran out of the shop.

Several times she turned round, still trembling, but she was not followed this time, and gradually her nervous fright subsided; before going into the next pawnbroker’s shop, she looked carefully up and



down the street. Here, after much voluble talking on the part of the woman at the counter, she obtained thirty sous for the little muff.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

WHAT was as hard to bear as the privations, as the constantly-increasing fear of finding the last poor resources fail, was the weariness of the long days ; the misery of having nothing to do. The weather changed once more ; it became cold, and the rain poured down so unceasingly that accounts of inundations filled the papers. It was impossible to go out at all, and poor Lil would sit in a sort of dull apathy for hours together. Her thoughts obstinately went back to the past ; she constantly saw herself, a

bright, happy girl surrounded and petted, and then shuddering, she would look round the bare walls of her poor room. At other times she would start, fancying she heard Leigh Ward's voice; then patiently, scene by scene, she would go over the story of her passion for him; the feeling she had experienced for him was so entirely gone, that she thought of these things with a sort of calm that astonished herself; she wondered whether she had indeed ever loved him; she wondered what in reality love might be? whether life could offer no higher sentiment than this uneasy, stormy, unsatisfactory sort of attraction. She tried to analyze her own heart, patiently dissecting it, and deriving no comfort whatever from the operation. Her story seemed to her but an episode—a sad and tormenting episode. Her life's happiness had been

wrecked, and there was none of the grandeur of tragedy about this wreck. Then she remembered many other such unfinished stories which she had almost forgotten; stories of girls she had known in society; in those days she had said to herself, "With me it will be different." But it had not been different.

She had been attracted by Leigh Ward, as very likely she would have been attracted by any man as good-looking as Leigh, and blessed with a voice as low and musical as his, whom at that time she might have chanced to find on her way. It was because she was young and full of life that she had fallen in love, not because Leigh Ward was worthy of affection. Then again she would fall to wondering whether that was all, whether there was not yet something in life beside what she had found,—a love built on mutual


esteem, which would endure through all phases of life; which would not break and disappear like the pretty tinted bubbles which children blow into the air.

Usually, when she arrived at this point of her reverie, the tears would fall slowly from her eyes. To her, this other, better love was now, of course, an impossibility; she had so wasted her chances of happiness, she had so fallen—through weakness rather than through any real fault—that what seemed to be the rightful lot of others, was no longer possible to her. She was a girl about whom people said wicked and unjust things; she lived among low people, in a place which it appeared was ill-famed; the only kindness she had received was from an actress; she felt humiliated by the knowledge of evil which, little by little, was forced upon her; something of that evil

must cling to herself, and mournfully she concluded that she could never again take her place in the world to which she had once belonged.

Then, sometimes, Lil would almost cease to think; her brain would grow dull and heavy, she would stare at the coloured prints, or count the flowers on the wall-paper, until a sudden fear of madness would make her start from her benumbed apathy. She had heard that solitary confinement usually did result in madness; and what was hers but solitary confinement?

Occasionally, Mademoiselle Finette would burst in upon her, and these were bright moments for the poor lonely girl; she never thought it necessary to shrink virtuously from Finette's side, only she was grateful for the delicacy which kept the "figurante" from speaking much about



herself, or her doings. They did not, however, see very much of each other. Usually, Finette came back very late, and was always in a hurry to leave her poor room; often, too, she did not come back at all: she had many friends in her own sphere, and these would, good-naturedly, offer her food and an occasional night's lodging, knowing her to be, as she expressed it, "*dans la débîne*."

"B-r-r-r!—how cold it is here!" exclaimed that young woman, coming in late one afternoon.

"Yes," answered Lil, with that sort of dull patience which continued suffering gives; "it is the cold which I find hardest to bear—that and the loneliness."

Finette stopped in the brisk walking up and down by which she was trying to warm herself, and looked at Lil attentively.

"Do you think it is right to let oneself die of hunger, and cold, and loneliness? You people who have religion say that suicide is a crime,—do you not look upon this as a sort of suicide?"

"I do not think I shall die of it," answered Lil, in the same patient way, "I am young and strong enough; it takes a great deal to kill a girl like me."

"But it is infamous! . . ."

"What is infamous?"

"To have left you alone in such a place as Paris, to float or sink as the case might be! I never was taught much about right or wrong, but if I had to judge your fine lady, I would condemn her without form of trial! What was she thinking about? You know nothing of life, you poor innocent! I saw that from the first, but she must have understood what she was

doing. Leave a girl to starve, or—why! a downright murder would be less wicked!” and Finette grew red with generous indignation. “How long will it be before you can receive help from your people?”

“It may be yet ten days.”

“And you have sold almost everything—they cheat you abominably, you poor child!”

“Almost everything; I had another week’s rent to pay the other day. But I still have my black silk dress; that ought to bring enough to keep me alive.”

“You must let me sell it for you. La Mère Bonassieu is furious; she vows she will not let you sell another article, for she must have something left to answer for her precious rent; the gentle Céleste has been instructed to watch you. As to me, I have

scarcely anything left. But, bah! the luck must turn before long. While we wait for it, let us dine together, you have bread, and I have a little cold boiled beef; it is frugal, but then frugality keeps one from growing stout; then afterdinner I shall take you with me to the theatre. It will amuse you, and at any rate you will be warm; it is dreadful to shiver all the time. By the way, more "figurantes" are wanted at the theatre, some of the best-looking have gone off; shall I get you in?"

"I know nothing about acting or dancing," stammered Lil, blushing.

"As to that, my dear, neither one nor the other would be expected of you; with two hours' training you would know your business—it is not difficult. The principal thing is to be good-looking and well-made. You are above the average in both respects."

“What should I be paid?”

“Not much, certainly; my pay, as you perceive, just enables me to buy a little cold meat. At any rate you shall go and see for yourself; you need a little change of ideas.”

Lil glanced around her bare, cold room; everything in it, from the dreadful prints to the limp curtains, spoke to her of her misery and loneliness. The temptation of warmth, of lights, of a glittering spectacle, was too strong for her; she yielded. Lil's theatre-going had been chiefly confined to the “Théâtre Français,” or to the opera, she had never seen a *Féerie*; she only knew dimly that these exhibitions were got up with extraordinary luxury and skill, but that many proper people objected to them.

When they reached the theatre, it was raining, and the light of numberless gas-jets

was tremblingly reflected on the wet pavement; people were hurrying in at the open doors, carriages stopping to put down their loads. Finette turned aside from all this bustle and noise, and the two girls went in by a low side-door, where groups of chattering women were putting down their dripping umbrellas, and shaking the rain-drops from their skirts. Finette, nodding to them, hurried on, followed closely by Lil, to whom she gave instructions, by no means superfluous, about steps and abrupt turnings. The passages they threaded were but half-lighted, by occasional flaring gas-lamps; there was a damp cellar-like feeling in the atmosphere, and certainly nothing entrancing or fairy-like to be seen anywhere. Suddenly they came upon an open space, crowded with actors, dancers, and machinists. Lil was be-

wildered by the noise, the sudden blaze of lights, the bustling to-and-fro ; some of the girls were already dressed, and their faces coarsely painted ; but most still wore their ordinary clothes, which contrasted oddly with the silk tights and the glittering gauzes of the dancers. In the midst of all this confusion strode an authoritative-looking man, whom Lil took to be the director himself, but who was merely, as she found out afterwards, the ballet-master. Finette went straight up to him, and said a few words in a low voice.

“ Very well ; bring her up,” said he.

Finette made a sign to Lil, who had remained a little behind, and who, guessing that her friend was proposing her as one of the required “ figurantes,” began to feel exceedingly uneasy ; the idea of showing herself in a costume in any way resembling

that of the very airily-attired damsels about her, filled her with dismay. However, she approached and submitted with what composure she could to the comprehensive glance of the ballet-master.

"Humph! she might do," then, as Lil looked down in her embarrassment, he took her by the chin to turn up her face to the light, saying familiarly, "Let us have a look at you, petite!"

Lil uttered an indignant exclamation, and started back in such evident terror, that all those about her burst into a loud laugh, in which the ballet-master joined.

"You may go, my dear, we want no such violets as you here," and he turned away to call over the names of those who were to figure in the first ballet.

"Oh! Finette, let me go," pleaded Lil, who longed for some corner in which to


hide herself from the amused stare of the men and women about her. Among the latter, were some mere children of fourteen or fifteen, who laughed as loud at her blushes, as their elders.

A few young men, in evening dress, haunters of the "coulisses," honoured her with some facetious remarks, which greatly excited the hilarity of the lookers on. At last Finette took compassion on the young girl, and hurried her away; she wished to leave the theatre altogether, but this she was not permitted to do. As Finette did not appear till the end of the first act, and had therefore plenty of time to dress, she took Lil to her friend the "ouvreuse," who wore pink ribbons in her cap, who had been pretty, and who now devoted herself to the cloaks and overcoats of the third gallery spectators. This worthy person

found the young girl a back seat, and there Finette left her, bidding her ask for her behind the scenes, after the fall of the curtain, as she would then require her help for rapid changes of costume during the second act.

Lil felt comparatively safe in her obscure corner; she was between two stout women who took no notice whatever of her. She had always been very fond of the theatre; there was even a fascination to her in the evil smells of the place, in the hot heavy atmosphere, in which rose an odour of orange peel, mingling with that of escaped gas.

The house was crowded, and certainly she could not complain of cold. When the curtain went up, she did her best to forget all her miseries, and she nearly succeeded. How, from the confusion she had witnessed



so short a time before, had that perfect order been obtained? how had those coarse women suddenly been changed into these graceful, beautiful houris? The rough side-scenes, of which she had caught a glimpse, had become fairy-like palaces, and wonderful gardens. She did not pay much attention to what the actors said, but her eyes were dazzled by the brilliant tableaux, by the dancing, by the extraordinary effects of light and colour. It seemed to her more than ever, that she was destined always to see the extremes of life,—misery and luxury, dreary want and the enchantment of all the splendours which can dazzle the eye.

But when the act was finished, and that in obedience to Finette's desire, and directed by her good-natured friend the "ouvreuse," she once more found her way

behind the scenes, all her timidity returned; she was stopped more than once, but when she said that she was Mademoiselle Finette's dresser, she was allowed to pass. At last she saw Finette in her scanty play-dress, and she noticed that one of the fashionable young men was talking to her. Suddenly she asked herself what Martha would think if she could see her in such company, and she grew more and more frightened; then she caught a glimpse of the ballet-master, who familiarly beckoned to her. Turning on her heel she fled, and never stopped till she found herself once more in the street, where the rain still pattered quietly on the wet pavement.

CHAPTER VI.

NO HOPE.

MADAME Bonassieu and her gossips did not know what to make of Lil; she was to them an anomaly, and each day the curiosity she excited became more intense. The wildest stories about her were circulated; she was a great lady involved in some shocking scandal, and hiding from her family; or she had committed a horrible crime, and some day or other she was sure to be arrested. This last supposition grew to be the favourite one; she was even followed in the streets, but as

she did not seem to avoid the thoroughfares, and as she walked on quietly, without any of those furtive glances over the shoulder properly belonging to persons with uneasy consciences, the supposition was combated by some with as much energy as it was sustained by others.

Finette was closely questioned on more than one occasion; but Finette, with a Parisian's love of mystifying, told a dozen different stories to as many eager listeners, and when these assembled to compare notes, they were forced to recognize that she had been making fun of them all. The closest watching, however, could discover nothing irregular in the young girl's conduct; that she was almost penniless was evident; it was ascertained, through much questioning of the baker, the milkman, and the mistress of the cooked meat

establishment, that each day her purchases became less and less important. Thanks to these tradespeople, Madame Bonassieu knew to a penny what Lil spent for her food. "It is indecent to eat so little," exclaimed that virtuous matron, who herself was blessed with a sturdy appetite; "and she drinks nothing but water!" this last, to French people, is a sign of utter destitution: the poorest workman finds means to drink wine.

Once, when Lil was out, her landlady by means of a double key entered her poor room. Everything was clean and in excellent order, that she was obliged to confess; but, to her horror, when she opened the trunk, which she did without the least scruple, she found it almost empty.

"I was sure of it," she exclaimed, as

she told her friends what she had done; "she goes out with a parcel, and comes back empty-handed—it all goes to the pawnbroker's shop; what is there now to answer to me for her rent? almost nothing! there's a week owing already: just let me catch her at it—the sly creature!"

It was true, almost everything had gone; she was so outrageously cheated at the second-hand shops, that the money she got barely sufficed to keep her alive. Finette had told her of the "Mont-de-Piété," where she at least would not, on account of her foreign accent, be cheated more than others; but to pawn anything there, one must have a passport, or a landlord's receipt, or some such paper to prove one's identity, and Lil possessed nothing of the kind. She was therefore quite at the mercy of these harpies, who, as her want

became more urgent, cheated her with greater shamelessness. There remained to her but one object of any value, and that was the black silk dress of which she had spoken to Finette; she had already asked what she might get for such a dress, and the sum proposed was so ridiculously small that she had refused to accept it. However, it became absolutely necessary to pay her rent, so, with a sigh, she tied up the dress one morning, and prepared to leave the house.

Madame Bonassieu—who could not always be in the porter's lodge, having work to do about the house—had instructed Céleste to keep a sharp look-out in her absence, even while she practised her eternal steps; the sweet child therefore kept a vigilant watch, greatly relishing her mission.

“Maman! maman!” she called out, as

she sprang from the lodge and clung to Lil, with imp-like gestures, digging her sharp nails in the young girl's wrists. Lil was thoroughly frightened at this unexpected onslaught, and when Madame Bonassieu rushed forward, she could but listen to her loud scolding in silence.

"Ah! that's the way you would rob an honest woman! I was too good to admit you; vagrants should be sent off pitilessly! I want my money, do you hear? there was nothing in your room to answer to me for the rent, but a dress, and—" here she tore open the parcel,—“and that you were walking off with; it's robbery!”

"I was going to sell it in order to pay you," said Lil, still trembling.

"I dare say! but I prefer to pay myself; you shan't have this back, till you give me every sou you owe me."

“No ; you cannot do that—it is all I have to depend on—I have nothing else left, and I must buy food—a little bread at least. You could not be so wicked ? You have no right ! . .”

“Have I not then ? we shall see ! Here, Céleste, put this in the closet.”

“But, madame—listen ! in a few days, at the latest, I shall receive money from home.”


“Very likely !” exclaimed the woman, talking louder and louder ; “creatures like you always have such stories by the bushel—goodness knows that if I were prudent, I should make you leave my house at once ! how do I know whether you are not some great criminal ? Suppose a judge were to say to me, ‘Ma’mé Bonassieu, how comes it that you, who have a reputation to sustain, should admit into your house vagrants,

—women who have no name, or home, or friends?’ There never was a mystery about a woman yet, that did not hide something shameful—it’s lucky for you, I tell you, that I am soft-hearted.”

Lil would have protested yet a little, but the loud talk of the portress had attracted several idlers, who all stared at her with varying degrees of ill-will. She was a foreigner—she was of course in the wrong; she turned quickly away, leaving the dress in Madame Bonassieu’s possession.

There was not even Finette to apply to now; that young person had not made her appearance since the evening when Lil had been tempted to go with her to the theatre.

No desolate, shipwrecked, miserable wretch, could have been more apparently abandoned of God and man, than was Lil at this time.



The poor child, during these dreadful weeks, did her best to turn for comfort there, where we are all told to seek for it ; but her prayers were barren and cold ; the miserable apathy which had fallen on her, crept even there. There was a sort of hardness in her heart too ; she could not yet bow down her head, it seemed to her that the punishment was greater than her fault, that it was more than she could bear, and a sense of rebellion rose in her. Yet this was only at times ; at others she would remain long on her knees trying to pray ; she would steal into churches and hide herself in shadowy corners, and stay there for hours. But there was something wrong about her devotion, for no answer came to her ; even in the churches she felt a creature set aside, a pariah ; she had no penny to give for her chair, and sometimes as she

knelt in her obscure corner, the fine gold-laced beadle would look at her contemptuously from his superb height, and she would shrink timidly away. The thought that in a great city like Paris, there must be some English priests to whom she could apply for help and comfort, crossed her mind more than once, but she did not know where to seek for them; and somehow, foolishly, she shrank from applying to any of the French priests she saw, she thought they would not believe her story: no young countrywoman of theirs could be in her position and yet be believed innocent. And so, she made no real effort to break through the apathetic hopelessness which hemmed her in on all sides.

At last a day came when Lil had literally not a sou with which to buy herself a bit of bread. The three weeks she had given

to her sister as the limit of time during which she could wait had just elapsed, and nothing had come; she felt utterly hopeless, yet she suffered perhaps less mental agony than she had done at first. She was patient in a numb, pitiful way. Physical weakness had much to do with this; she was beginning to feel the effect of gradual starvation, she had occasional fits of dizziness, and then long hours of partial insensibility. The petty miseries of her position took in her eyes more importance than its real dangers: she grew cunning and clever in her avoidance of Madame Bonassieu, and of her curious fellow-lodgers; she would watch before venturing to pass by the lodge, hiding in the obscurity of the turning staircase, and then dart out, while Céleste was out, and her mother busy at work. But this did not always succeed,

the portress was possessed with the idea that her young lodger was capable of selling her own property, and once actually searched her, as though there had been any possibility of hiding a sheet, like a pocket-handkerchief. It was only by stratagem that Lil was able to carry out the last articles of which she could dispose; now, there was nothing left, nothing but her trunk, and that her tyrant would certainly not permit her to sell.

Lil remained in her room the greater part of that day on which she found herself entirely destitute, but at last she grew very restless; it seemed to her that she would feel the gnawing pain less if she were out of doors. Her landlady saw her as she was on the point of slipping by, and stood before her menacingly.

“Are you going to pay me—once for all?”

“ It seems to me that you have paid yourself,” said Lil.

“ What I want is my money ; give me that, and I will give you back your frippery fast enough ! ”

“ I have no money,” said poor Lil.

“ Then why don’t you get some ? ” and she added some coarse, vile words which made Lil cry out as though she had received a blow.

“ Well, my fine lady, I have but this to say to you : bring me my money this evening, or stay away altogether. I shall let my room to some one who can pay me.”


Lil tottered out into the street, little caring which way she went.

The thought of going once more to the bank floated in her mind ; the clerk had promised twice to send any letters arriving for her to the house ; but he might have

neglected to do so. She turned in the direction of the bank, then suddenly took another street. She had not the courage to face those people again; besides, it would be useless—there was nothing for her; of that she felt sure.

It was a fine day at last after the rain, but she scarcely noticed the sunshine; she went on mechanically, seeing no one, though many people as they passed looked at her curiously.

Finally, tired out, she turned into the Tuileries gardens, and sat down on one of the stone benches. It was towards the end of the afternoon, but children were still playing in groups, while the nurses sat gossiping together. No one noticed her, and she remained so still on her stone bench, that some little birds came picking up crumbs almost at her feet. By and



by a child—a beautiful toddling little boy, who was amusing himself with a spade and pail—approached her, finding doubtless the sand near the bench less hard to manage than that which was constantly being trodden. He looked at Lil very gravely for some instants, then concluding that she was not formidable he began to fill his pail, biting away meanwhile at a big cake.

Soon the operation of the pail-filling became so absorbing, that he let his cake fall, and apparently forgot all about it. Lil felt her cheeks grow red; she was fascinated by that bit of cake, she could not take her eyes from it; by a sudden almost unconscious movement she covered it with the hem of her dress, and then resumed her immovability.

“Bon Dieu! where is the child?” ex-



claimed a buxom nurse, who, in an animated conversation with one of the guardians of the place, had quite forgotten her charge ; perceiving the little fellow, she seized him in spite of his cries and vigorous kicks, and before long Lil saw her leave the garden, carrying the child in her arms.

Cautiously looking about her, she then picked up the piece of cake, and eagerly ate it.

After this, she recommenced her aimless wanderings. As she passed by the Madeleine, she heard the organ peal ; it was the beginning of the Lenten season, and there was evidently an afternoon service. Lil went in ; there were a good many people in the church, and a sermon had just been preached.

The organ notes rolled out superbly in the big church ; few sounds are more touch-

ing; it seemed to Lil that it was for her especially that the organ was being played, that hope and succour were at last being sent to her from above. Presently the worshippers passed out; the organ ceased, a little choir boy began to put out the altar lights. A few praying women alone remained; Lil now knelt on a "prie-Dieu," for out of service-time no one would come for money, and leaning her cheek on her hands she tried to pray. The only words that would come to her were, "My God, have pity on me,—have pity on me!" Little by little, the hushed silence of the place, the vague odour of incense which still floated in the air, acted soothingly on her senses; she forgot her hunger, her desolateness; she was almost happy.

"This is not a place to sleep in," said a voice close to her, and a sacristan with gold

chain, and look of authority, roughly took her by the shoulder.

"I do not think I was sleeping," said Lil meekly.

"At any rate, it is time to go; we are about to lock the church."

Lil rose obediently, but she was so weak that she had to hold the chair an instant to steady herself. A priest was passing by, and he stopped to look at the pale girl; he hesitated, but Lil, who saw him, made no sign; she was growing bitter once more, it seemed as though God were as merciless to her, as man. The good priest even followed her a few steps, but she hurried out; then he stopped and shook his head.


CHAPTER VII.

THE DREAD TEMPTATION.

It was night, and Lil stood looking at the swollen, furious river. The inundations all over the country had been serious, and the Seine had risen alarmingly; the waters broke about the great stone pillars of the bridge with a sinister roar; great fragments were hurled along by the yellow whirling waves—fragments which, in the semi-obscurity, she could not recognize; they might be big branches, or parts of house-tops, or drowned animals, or corpses of unfortunate men and women.

She did not exactly remember how she had come to this bridge; it seemed very long ago since she had been sent out of the church; and during the interval she had wandered along the streets, or rested on the benches which she found on her way. She knew that she had stopped more than once before tempting restaurant windows, where fish and game, and bunches of early asparagus were displayed to the best possible advantage in the midst of flowers; she knew that she had smelt the odour of cooking which came up in puffs from the kitchens of these same restaurants, and that her cruel hunger was most hard to bear at such moments.

There was a phrase which came back to her constantly, in the midst of the wild fancies which constantly floated through her brain—a phrase which she seemed to



have heard years ago, perhaps even in a previous state of existence ; just as, sometimes in a dream, we see places and people which are familiar to us, though we are certain that we never really saw them, and hear sentences, the end of which we know beforehand. The phrase was this : “ There is insanity in your family ; insanity which leads to suicide—moral or otherwise.”

The river tempted her—attracted her horribly ; but, by a singular contradiction, the thought which kept her back was that rescue would be impossible, that in that furious tormented water no swimmer could live, no boat could be guided. The thought of the sin did not intrude itself on her mind, she was too weak to reason ; her thoughts whirled like the waves below ; she saw sudden flashes of red and yellow light before her eyes, and through it all there

was the gnawing, the dreadful pain of hunger.

Stories of shipwrecked mariners, of emigrants lost in snow, of poor wretches left to die of starvation in prisons, came back to her mind. She knew that it was a slow death, that one could live a week—more, sometimes—without food; with her, it would not be nearly so long, of course: she had been too much weakened during the preceding time; but, meanwhile, it was great suffering; death in that swollen river would be but a short agony.

“You must not stay here, you must move on.” It was a policeman who spoke to her; he was not rough or brutal, he frightened her greatly nevertheless, and she hastily obeyed. But the attraction of the river was so great that she remained close to it. There was another bridge not

far off, a great bridge with a rounded space in the middle, in which there was a statue of Henri IV. on horseback ; there were semi-circular stone benches at regular intervals along the parapet, and Lil sat down on one of these. She stayed there some little time ; she was suffering less, and her mind was a little clearer, but she was so tired, so worn out, that her one thought was to remain unnoticed in her corner ; she scarcely even felt the night-cold.

“La charité! ma petite dame—la charité!”

She looked around, and saw a beggar, who had lost both legs, and who was dragging himself along on a sort of wooden seat, with the aid of his two hands, which were, so to speak, shod with wood.

Lil actually laughed ; the beggar looked at her alarmed, it might have been the laugh of a mad woman.

"Charity!" she said; "why, I have not a sou with which to buy a little loaf—I am starving."

"And you are waiting till there are no passers-by to throw yourself into the river?"

"Perhaps," and once more Lil looked at the water.

"Don't—don't, now!—the water's so yellow and dirty."

This argument touched Lil absurdly; she shuddered. The beggar freeing one of his hands, fumbled in his pocket.

"Here!" he said, "I've not had a bad day; take this," and he offered her a copper.

Lil took it eagerly, and hurried away, scarcely waiting to thank her strange benefactor; she forgot everything, save that now she could buy herself some bread; then she would venture back to the house;

Madame Bonassieu had not perhaps carried her threat into execution, and she so longed to creep into her poor bed ! So she hurried on, holding the two-sous piece so tight that it quite hurt her.

It was already late, and many of the shops were closed. She walked on and on, looking out eagerly for a baker's; she passed several restaurants, all brilliant with gas-jets, but she did not dare to apply there for a little loaf.

Suddenly, she found herself facing several young men, who apparently had dined or supped too well.

"La gentille fille!" exclaimed one, and the others echoed the sentiment. Lil tried to pass on, but they surrounded her; she did not speak, but looked at them with frightened, widely-opened eyes. Then there came to her a terrible temptation: if

she went with these men, they would give her something to eat, something more than a pennyworth of bread; she leaned against the wall of a house, feeling very faint. At that moment two other men passed by, and she caught the sound of English words; gathering all her remaining strength, she cried out,—

“Whoever you are, save me from these wretches!”

One of the two sprang forward with an exclamation of horror.

“Miss Temple!” and he was at her side in an instant.

“Oh! John—I am so glad.”

She clung to him, half-fainting but perfectly happy; she was safe. She did not hear what John said to her persecutors, but they went quietly away; then she said in a whisper,—

“Give me something to eat, John; I am starving, and it hurts so. I have eaten nothing for so long!”

He could scarcely answer, he seemed choking.

“My poor child! my poor child!” it was all he could say; but he stroked her hand gently, while he supported her as best he could. He said something to the friend who was with him, and the young man went away rapidly.

There was a restaurant close by, and he led Lil to it; a waiter came to meet them, and said with mysterious discretion,—

“Cabinet particulier, monsieur?”

“Yes—confound you!” muttered John.

There was a little sofa in the room, and he placed Lil on it; she let herself be cared for like a child. John gave some orders to the waiter, then he knelt by Lil, took off

her hat, and, not knowing what else to do, smoothed her hair, in a pathetic, helpless way; she tried to smile, but he thought he would rather have seen her cry.

The table was already set, and there were little loaves by the plates, and a plate of big red prawns in the centre. Lil looked eagerly at the loaves.

“No; not that, Miss Temple,—not that, Lil; fresh bread would be dangerous, I fear. I have ordered some strong soup, and a loaf of yesterday’s bread; try and be patient.”

She did try, but her eyes instinctively sought the table; then she remembered the copper which she still held in her hand, she showed it to John, and told him about the beggar who had lost both legs, speaking in little disjointed sentences.

“You know I should have bought fresh

bread with it; do you think it would have killed me? . . . Don't, John, don't!" for the young man, despite his best efforts, could scarcely choke down his emotion. "It's all over now."

The waiter then brought what John had ordered, too well trained to show the amazement and contempt he felt at such a supper.


John sat by the young girl, supporting her head against his shoulder, and feeding her as though she had been a little child.

"How good!" she exclaimed over and over again.

"Oh, John!" she would add, shuddering, "you do not know how it hurts to starve; to feel oneself dying inch by inch."

"My poor darling—my poor darling!"

There was no hiding what he felt at such a moment; and she seemed in no way



astonished at his words, only grateful in a child-like way, grateful and very happy.

When the first hunger was a little appeased, Lil was taken with a great longing for sleep; still resting her head on John's shoulder, her eyes closed heavily; but it was for a few minutes only. She soon started up, and began to talk wildly and incoherently; her face, so white till then, grew crimson, and she no longer seemed to recognize the young man at her side.

John rang, and ordered a carriage; when it came, Lil was in a raging fever.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN SAFETY.

“AND now, will you have the goodness to explain to me what all this means?”

Mrs. Crayton had contained her indignation very long for her, but she could contain it no longer. She had been roused from her first sleep by the friend John had sent to her; forced to turn everything in the apartment topsy-turvy; to show herself before masculine eyes in an undress incompatible with her usual dignity; and all this, without any explanation. Now,

the grey morning light was beginning to steal into the room, it gave to the candles a certain ghastliness, and to her own face a greyish and unbecoming colour; her appearance altogether was eccentric, to say the least of it. She had, in her haste, attired herself in a short petticoat, a shawl was tightly wrapped about her shoulders, and her hair on the forehead was done up in little screws, for she wore it in frizzes; this sacrifice to the fashion of the day being her manner of asserting that she still considered herself as young and good-looking; as a woman by no means incapable of causing ravages in manly breasts.

“The meaning of what, Madge?”

“Of all this night’s doings. Is this a hospital, or an asylum for wandering maidens?”

“Miss Temple was alone, in want, and

ill. We have taken her in ; what could be more simple ? ”

“ She has taken you in, rather, my poor boy.”

“ Madge ! ”

“ How came she to be alone at midnight, in the streets of Paris ? ”

“ I do not know.”

“ How is it that she did not accompany Mrs. Cox, as you believed her to have done ? ”

“ She did not say.”

“ Then you know absolutely nothing about her ? ”

“ I know who she is, and that suffices.”


“ You did not ask a single question, before bringing her under the same roof with your sister ? ”

“ She was too ill to be tormented by questions.”

“You are incorrigible, John! If you found her in the streets, it was doubtless because she was there in her rightful place,” exclaimed the widow hotly.

John had till then answered calmly enough; he always avoided discussions with his sister, and habitually yielded to her wishes in small every-day matters; but when he heard these last words, he turned a little pale, and said in a quiet but determined voice,—

“This is the last time, I trust, that you will say, or insinuate such things. Miss Temple is worthy of all respect, she is as blameless—as yourself, of that I am absolutely sure; she is to stay here, as our honoured guest, until she has entirely recovered. If you find it irksome to take care of her, I can as easily have two nurses for her as one; therefore you need not go



into her room at all. But here she shall remain, and I beg—I desire that if you do go near her, you may treat her with all the gentleness and respect which she deserves, and which her situation requires.”

John did not stop to hear Mrs. Crayton’s answer; she looked after him utterly astounded at the tone of command and authority he had used towards her; she wiped her eyes a little, and shook her head ominously; but as there was no one to whom she could confide her indignation, she sensibly concluded, that the best thing she could do, was to return to her own room, and try to make up for the past hours of sleeplessness.

John that night had done wonders; he had been cool, quick-witted, and very active.

Now, however, there was nothing more to be done ; the doctor had gone, promising to return early in the morning, and Lil was left to the nurse ; she was very ill, the doctor had told him, and would require great care ; but she was young, and there was no reason to despair. John repeated this to himself many times, but it did not quiet him, he could not rest—the thought of her present danger, of all the sufferings she had undergone, haunted him. He would lose himself in conjectures as to the causes of the abandonment in which he had found her : that this abandonment might have been occasioned by any wrong-doing of hers, he did not admit for a moment.

Mrs. Crayton was not half as hard-hearted as she made herself out to be. She kept away from the sick-room, and maintained

a severe silence towards her brother, for the first half of the day, but the second half she passed entirely with the invalid. She was in her element, the helplessness of the sick girl appealed to her ; whenever a will was opposed to her will, she grew hard and austere, but where she felt entirely mistress, all that was womanly in her came into play. The doctor, on his return, had found his patient rather worse than better—she was in real danger ; there was, consequently, no room for any feeling save great pity, mingled with a little awe. Mrs. Crayton was not a woman of half-measures ; her sympathies being roused, she proved to be devoted and indefatigable.

Towards the end of the afternoon, Issy Richards entered the studio ; she usually came in at that hour to show John her day's work, and to ask his advice about it.

She was settled in the French family by this time, and went regularly to the "atelier" of a celebrated painter, where she worked with a number of other young women. She was not quite satisfied with this arrangement; in the first place, the master did not seem to recognize that she was a being a little apart,—that she had greater talent, and especially greater originality than her fellow-students; she did not relish having to learn the *a b c* of her art, when she felt quite equal to the painting of important original compositions. On entering she had shown her attempts to the great painter, who had treated them with but little consideration. "You are too ambitious," he had said to her, "first learn to draw; then, afterwards, we shall see about the rest." And he put her back to plaster casts and such things. She came

to the conclusion—helped therein by other malcontents—that her master, being an academician, a man of systems and order, was incapable of recognizing original talent. She had sense enough, however, to keep most of her reflections to herself, and plodded away at her drawings seriously enough. What consoled her during this time of tribulation, was that she had the support of John's advice and encouragement. He did not seem to think the plaster casts derogatory to her dignity; she allowed him to laugh at her, whereas even mild criticisms from others irritated her pride; she looked upon him as her real master.

Issy walked into the painting-room unannounced; she was completely at home in John's establishment, far more so than Mrs. Crayton approved of. This time,

instead of finding the young man working away to the accompaniment of soft whistling, she found him sitting with folded hands, looking pale and anxious.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Issy, stopping short; "not at work—are you not well?"

"Yes," answered John, "I am well enough."

"Then what is it?"

"Miss Temple is here, dangerously ill: she was left by that woman unprotected and penniless. I found her last night in the street, starving."

Issy usually received any piece of news, with a perfect avalanche of words; but this time she was quite silent; she sat down quietly, and turned a little pale.

At that moment Mrs. Crayton entered the studio.

“Well?” questioned John; he and his sister were on excellent terms now.

“It is always the same thing; the fever is very high, she talks incessantly—it’s pitiful! At times, she seems to be imploring the pity of some woman—a landlady, I suppose—begging to be let in; that the streets at night frighten her, that the river is there calling to her, and that she is afraid. Then she will lose that idea, and call out that she is hungry—so hungry!”

There was a short silence; then Issy rose. There was a sort of constraint in the way in which she took her leave, and expressed her distress at what had happened to her friend Lil. John did not offer to look at her drawings, and she kept her portfolio under her arm. Mrs. Crayton looked after her with a sharp, shrewd

glance ; but her brother scarcely noticed that she had gone.

The worthy French family who had, after much hesitation, consented to take Issy in, for a consideration, were even more scandalized than usual, by the young girl's eccentric manners. She scarcely touched her dinner, and went up to her room immediately after, without even wishing a good-night to the different members of the family. Issy was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice the indignation she excited. She was puzzled ; she did not exactly understand why, when she heard that Lil was established in that room, which somehow she looked upon as belonging to herself ; that she was ill, and in need of tenderness and care,—the feeling she had experienced had not been one of sympathetic compassion. It almost

seemed to her that Lil had taken an unfair advantage in thus exciting the pity of all, even of cold Mrs. Crayton. All this was very perplexing, and Issy spent the greater part of the night in trying to understand it, but without much success.


CHAPTER IX.

DISAGREEABLE NEWS.

MRS. COX had greatly enjoyed her travelling in the north of Italy. Of her own accord, she would perhaps not have spent so much time in small, out-of-the-way towns, visiting monasteries and churches for the sake of a few smoky old pictures; personally she cared little for the "local colour" of queer streets with arcades, and irregular "piazze" with old fountains. But she had fallen in with a charming English family—of the highest rank, of course—who delighted in all such things. As these ex-

cursions were after all pleasant enough, as the young ladies of the party were gay as well as intelligent, good-looking as well as aristocratic; as, furthermore, through these people she became acquainted with various Italian families of the purest nobility, Mrs. Cox did not find the time hang heavily on her hands. Besides, she was not sorry to forget the events of the past few months; she succeeded in doing so, admirably.

But there is an end to all things, and one day Mrs. Cox found herself established at a hotel in Florence. Here, the mass of letters which had accumulated during her wanderings, was at last delivered to her. She had engaged no other companion, and the task of looking over these notes and letters was a tedious one. She yawned over it, as she lay back on her sofa, and



tore open the envelopes. There were two letters for Miss Temple, directed to her care, which had been forwarded from Paris with the rest. She had omitted giving orders about Lil's letters; such small matters do escape one's memory often. They were from Martha she knew. Should they be sent back to Lakeville, or should she merely burn them? This indecision of hers brought back the thought of her young companion, about whom she had not troubled her brain much of late. She smiled a little contemptuously as she remembered that she had positively felt some interest in that girl's fortune, and had been angry that her own plans for it should not have succeeded. She had seen Mr. Smith's name on the strangers' list, at this very hotel. She had not seen him, however; as she never went to a table d'hôte, she had

but few occasions of meeting her fellow-lodgers.

She was beginning to be decidedly sleepy, when she heard a knock at the door,—not a discreet, humble knock, but one impatient, and almost imperious.

“Come in,” she called out.

Mr. Barnard Smith himself walked, or rather rushed in, a crumpled newspaper in his hand, and his hat, which he had quite forgotten, pushed to the back of his head.

“Have you seen this?” he exclaimed, not even stopping to salute her, or to make any apology for his abrupt entrance. Mrs. Cox coolly looked at him from head to foot without changing her attitude, or answering his question.

“Have you a cold in your head, Mr. Smith, that you fear to uncover yourself?”

Mr. Smith hastily took off his hat.

"This is not a moment to think of ceremony," he said, but in a less angry, authoritative tone of voice than that which he had first used.

"There are certain forms of ceremony which are never out of place. Pray sit down, and then I will listen to what you have to say."

Mr. Smith sat down on the chair to which she pointed. He felt that the advantage, so far, was not on his side; but he was undaunted, nevertheless.

"What have you done with Miss Temple?" he asked.

Mrs. Cox laughed a little.

"It is to be a regular interrogatory, I see. Why do you not ask at the same time what I have done with Thérèse, my maid, whom I dismissed last week, when I

discovered that she had stolen my laces ? I dismissed Lil Temple, my companion—not because she had robbed me, it is true, but because her conduct was not above reproach. You see, the two cases are about parallel.”

“You know that they are not. You took a young girl away from her friends, because it was your caprice to do so ; you left her alone, inexperienced and innocent as she is, in a city like Paris, exposed to want, and to all the temptations want engenders,—because the caprice had passed away ; you were tired of your plaything. It was infamous !” Then, as Mrs. Cox raised her head haughtily, he added, “Read this.”

There was something in his manner which, in spite of her cool disdain, alarmed her a little. She took the paper ; it was an American sheet, published in Paris.

She read the following paragraph, headed "Mysterious Disappearance :"—"We understand that one of our American bankers received two days ago, a registered letter addressed to his care for a young lady, who had been employed by one of our most fashionable countrywomen as companion, and dismissed by her some time back. He sent the letter to the address given by the young lady, but the portress of the house declared that the young lady in question had left early in the afternoon of the preceding day, and had not been seen since. The woman added that she owed two weeks' rent, and that she was supposed to be in extreme want. Fears of a suicide are entertained. We refrain purposely from giving names as yet. The sad affair is, we understand, being thoroughly investigated."

Mrs. Cox was a little less contemptuous

when she put down the paper; she, however, said very composedly,—

“And you conclude that this girl is Lil Temple?”

“I do.”

“Well, you are mistaken. Lil went by the ‘Péreire,’ more than three weeks since; I paid her passage.”

“That is impossible. I had friends going by that boat, and I looked over the list of passengers carefully; her name was not in it.”

“But I tell you that I paid her passage!”

“Did you attend to it yourself?”

Mrs. Cox reflected an instant, then said, a little reluctantly,—

“No, I had not the time to do so; I sent my maid with the money.”

“Your maid—the same whom you dismissed last week, because she had stolen

your laces ! Do you know that if that child, in a moment of despair took her own life, it is you, who in reality are her murderess ? What ! when the welfare, the honour perhaps of a young girl are at stake, you trust your maid—a woman who doubtless was jealous of her—with the care of providing for her safety !”


“ Listen to me !” exclaimed Mrs. Cox.

“ No. What can you say that would justify you in my eyes ? I shall start immediately for Paris, and if harm has come to Lil Temple, your name shall be in all the papers of Europe and America, and it shall not be my fault if it is not synonymous with infamy.”

He had gone, before she could induce him to hear a word, before she could speak of the liberal sum she had left for her companion. Perhaps that also had never

reached her; Mrs Cox was seriously annoyed—troubled even. That Mr. Smith would put his threat into execution, was not doubtful, and she cared very much for the world's opinion. She remained a long time ruminating, with knit brows. At last a resolution formed itself in her mind, and the frown left her forehead.

Mr. Smith was not a man who ever allowed the grass to grow under his feet. Still dusty and tired from his unbroken journey, he rushed to the banker's, and was soon in possession of all that was known about Lil. There was not much to tell. The police was prosecuting its search, and the testimony of Madame Bonassieu had been taken; a policeman declared having seen a young girl answering to the description given, who had, that evening, lingered on the bridge with suspicious persistency;



that, on being told she must move on, however, she had done so without any show of resistance; he had not seen her since.

Mr. Smith sat listening to all this in silence; finally, when there was nothing more to be told, he said,—

“And did you not guess that she was in want of money? could you not have helped her? You must have known that her friends would not have allowed you to be losers by such an act of humanity.”

“In the first place, Mr. Smith, she never asked for any advance. I believe she only came to the bank two or three times.”

“If she did not come more often, it was probably that she was made to feel all the humiliation of her position. We moneyed men are not always tender to the poor! But was there no woman among the Americans here, who, knowing her story,

could feel for this poor child—no woman who had daughters of her own?”

A clerk, who stood by during this dialogue, said that he had noticed that one morning Mrs. Paige had had some conversation with Miss Temple.

On this faint clue, Mr. Smith started to see the lady. But there was a place he visited beforehand ; a place which, during the sleepless night of travel, he had seen constantly before his eyes, the “Morgue.” He told no one that he was going there ; during his conversation with the banker, this gentleman had incidentally said that the Morgue had been searched, fortunately without success. As several days had already elapsed since the disappearance, the probabilities of the case were, that Lil had taken refuge with some friend, and had perhaps even left the city. Mysteries were often

cleared up in a simple and prosaic manner. But Mr. Smith was not to be comforted so easily; he would go and see for himself. When he left the low, sinister-looking building he sat down on the stone bench outside, entirely overcome. He had not known, till he glanced at the motionless forms, fearing to recognize among the drowned women this fair young girl, how much he had really cared for her.

Mrs. Paige was at home, and consented to receive her visitor. She looked a little astonished at his dusty, unwashed appearance, and at his haggard expression; but as soon as she understood the motive of his visit, she became attentive and serious.

"Yes," she said, when he had finished. "I did speak to Miss Temple at the bank; I remember that I was embarrassed to

know exactly what my duty in the case might be."

"She asked you to help her."

"She asked me to recommend her as seamstress to one of the 'Maisons de blanc.'"

"And you refused?"

"Mr. Smith, the case was a very delicate one. According to Mrs. Cox's account, and according to my own conviction, this unfortunate girl had placed herself in so false a position that it became very difficult for a woman like myself to extend any efficacious help to her. I offered her money, which she refused to take; but, under the circumstances, I could not in conscience go warrant for her respectability."

Mr. Smith rose excitedly.

"You could not answer for Lil Temple's

respectability? Why, there's not a purer, more stainless girl in Christendom! Mrs. Cox was tired of her, and chose the first pretext she could think of to get rid of her; and certainly she could not have found a better one; for, true or false, accuse a girl in Miss Temple's position of ill-conduct, and she is done for! how is the poor creature ever to disprove the accusation?"

"You take up her cause warmly," said Mrs. Paige, with a slightly ironical emphasis.

"Certainly I do! I will tell you why: I wanted her to be my wife; she is the only woman who ever really charmed me; I found in her what I do not often find in the girls of our time—that is, perfect naturalness. Do you know what she answered—this girl on whom your virtuous

world turns its back?—that she had been sorely tempted to accept my offer, because, poor child! she had no home, and but few friends; but that she had too much esteem and liking for me to become my wife, as she feared that she had no love to give me. How many fashionable misses, do you think, would have done as she did?”

“It is generous of you, at any rate, to defend a girl who, while she hesitated about accepting your proposal, allowed another—who never thought of marrying her—to make love to her.”

“I will not believe that!” he said almost violently; then, presently, in a changed tone he continued, “And if it were true? you would feel justified in pushing her—with your woman’s hands, you, a mother of daughters—of pushing

her into hopeless degradation? For you must know what temptations, want—starvation bring in their train? You, honest women, who are so proud of your good standing in the world, do you ever ask yourselves to what you owe your blamelessness? Do you think that it is so high a merit, as to give you the right to be hard-hearted and contemptuous to the rest of humanity?”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Smith,” said the lady, rising, “but I cannot possibly continue this discussion. We shall never agree; I do not consider myself hard-hearted or contemptuous of misfortune, even merited. I am greatly distressed at what has happened, but I feel in no way responsible for it. I maintain that in a society where there is more misery than one can possibly alleviate, it is our duty

rather to help those who are unhappy through no fault of theirs, than those who suffer from the consequences of their own wrong-doing."

Mr. Smith understood that the interview was terminated: he hurriedly took his leave.


The next morning, a long article written under his direction appeared in the paper; Mrs. Cox was not named, but she was so clearly designated that doubt was impossible; this article was reproduced in "Galignani's Messenger," and in the principal London papers. The theme was taken up, discussed, commented upon, and public opinion turned with characteristic rapidity in favour of Lil, and against Mrs. Cox. It became evident to all, save to the most prejudiced minds, that she had been calumniated,—what proof was there

of her guilt? Each one remembered the perfect propriety of her manner, her modesty, her retiring grace. Pity made of her a heroine.

CHAPTER X.

“MY DARLING!”

THE American colony in Paris had that year,—and has still, perhaps—about as many circles as Dante’s *Inferno*. The comparison extends no farther than to the number. Each of these “cliques” held aloof from the others, after the fashion of “sets” in a provincial town, or “parties” in political assemblies, or the corresponding divisions in girls’ schools. There was the circle of old residents, which looked with suspicion on all new comers, which had its traditions, and gave select parties.



There was much tittle-tattle in this set, much evil-speaking, first of the French, whom they considered rather as intruders in their own city of Paris; secondly, of those country people who belonged to other sets. These old residents had their virtues also: they upheld each other, worshipped their minister, and did a little amateurish charity within very narrow limits. To this set belonged Mrs. Paige. Then there was the diplomatic circle, and the ultra-fashionable set, made up especially of persons whose immense wealth put them above small distinctions. Both of these sets frequented a certain number of French houses, where they were never made to feel quite at home, but where they consoled themselves by displaying astoundingly expensive toilettes. These—of the ultra-fashionable set—were people who, during

the Empire went to Court; who were invited to Compiègne where, unfortunately, they gave a singular idea of their country's Republican virtues; who treated the titled people they frequented with great familiarity; who, in the person of an exceedingly pretty woman, called out to the Emperor one evening, incited thereto by a bet: "Just look! I've torn my flounce—you haven't such a thing as a pin about you?" to the unutterable horror of the waxed-mustachioed Majesty. People who looked upon Cabanel as the greatest painter living, who had full-length portraits painted by him, and then boasted of the immense price they paid for them; people who, in the eyes of the "Figaro" and of M. Victorien Sardou, represented American civilization.

Then there was the floating American

population ; families who were to stay a month, or six months, in the big city, who haunted the “Bon Marché” and ordered cart-loads of dresses to take home, declaring that they were instigated thereto by an enlightened spirit of economy. These were outsiders, touching by certain corners all the various sets, but belonging to none. There were other outsiders besides : workers, artists or writers, students—men and women too—who had no time to follow the fluctuations of society or listen to its gossip ; who lived quiet retired lives with their families, even in the midst of the Paris whirl.

To these last belonged John Bruce. He was, above all things, a worker ; and though his great facility in producing, and his power of endurance, enabled him at times to spend some of his evenings in the

different houses where he began to be frequently invited, yet, once those society duties fulfilled, he became engrossed once more with his work. At this time, more than ever, he shut himself up; he refused to see his friends, did not even open a newspaper, and sent word to his sitters, that he was unable for the moment to continue their portraits. He was absorbed by one great fear, and the event of each morning and evening was the doctor's visit. So, it happened that he remained some little time in complete ignorance of the excitement occasioned by Lil's disappearance. He did not know the young girl's address; he did not know that letters were waiting for her at the bank; he knew nothing about her—save that she was very ill, and that she might die.

It was Issy Richards who brought the



news. She had seen on her last visit that her presence was not as welcome as usual; this she had resented and had kept away. She from time to time came for news of the sick girl, but carefully avoided the painting-room on these occasions. One day however, she burst in as of old, exclaiming,—

“Here’s a pretty to-do!”

“What is it?” asked John, starting nervously.

Issy read him the long article inspired by Mr. Smith.

“Those who do not recognize Mrs. Cox in that description must be wilfully blind! I for one am not sorry! I only hope all the Lakeville papers will copy the article! There were too many feathers in her cap, and this will pluck one or two out of it, I fancy. Lil Temple was a goose ever to trust herself with such a woman! I wonder

what she had done to give Mrs. Cox a pretext for leaving her to her fate? the article just hints at some calumny. . . . Where are you going?"

"To the bank; that is evidently the place from which the news I have to give will be most quickly spread abroad."

At the bank, the first person John saw, was Mr. Barnard Smith. He looked older and shaggier even than when they had met in the Louvre, but there was an expression of great earnestness in his rugged face; as soon as he saw John, he went up to him, and shook hands vigorously.

"You know we have no news yet," he said.

"I bring you news," said John quietly; "Miss Temple is now with my sister; she is dangerously ill—indeed she may not recover; but, at any rate, she is being cared for."

Immediately John was surrounded; he had to tell the whole story; on his side, he learned many things which he, till then, had only guessed at. There was universal sympathy expressed for the young girl now; the banker himself was loudest in his expressions of pity; no one thought of imputing any evil-doing to her: she was a victim.

The letters which had arrived just too late, were handed to John, then he turned to go; all this talk, all these conjectures sickened him; the sympathy itself sounded hollow in his ears. He was wrong probably in this; worldly people are often sincere for a few moments at a time; but when he measured those light words of compassion with his own cruel anxiety, he had but one desire—to escape.

“Let me go with you,” said Mr. Smith.

“I want to see with my own eyes that she is still alive.”

They walked on in silence.

The days went on wearily enough. The first violence of the fever had abated, but the prostration which followed was so great, that Lil's life hung on a thread; she lay nearly all the time quite motionless, sometimes following with her eyes the nurse, or Mrs. Crayton, as they moved noiselessly about the room; but usually even that seemed too much of an exertion, and her eyelids would drop heavily. At night the delirium usually returned, and she would talk rapidly and incoherently; but never, even in the most violent of her fever fits, had she pronounced the name of Leigh Ward; she had apparently forgotten him.

Mrs. Crayton reigned despotically over

the sick-room. Lil was so ill, that she ceased to be a personality—she was a patient; in that capacity she became an object of great interest to her indefatigable nurse, whose despotism, however absolute, was governed by excellent sense. Mrs. Crayton felt that the sick girl belonged to her, the doctor himself was but an auxiliary: in spite of her real sympathy and anxiety, she almost enjoyed this time. Her brother was obliged to submit to her: he wanted to pass half his time by the bed-side, but he was allowed merely to peep in when Lil lay with her eyes closed; no greater privilege was accorded to him than to Mr. Smith, who had taken up his abode close by, and whom she had no little trouble in reducing to proper submission. Each day brought but little change; the doctor at every visit counted the number of pulsa-

tions, and consulted his memoranda of the past days; he was not satisfied; he did not understand why a young patient with a good constitution, should not react against the disease; there was something unaccustomed in the case, which upset all his calculations.

One evening, Mrs. Crayton had just sent the nurse out of the room to prepare the night potions. As she stood by the bed she noticed that Lil's eyes were fixed on her with more expression than usual.

"What is it?" she asked, gently patting the pillow into a more comfortable shape.

Lil opened her parched lips, but the sound that came from them was so faint that Mrs. Crayton did not hear it; she bent down lower; with an evident effort Lil managed to say audibly,—

"Where am I?"



“In safety, my dear; don’t trouble your poor head to think about it, try and sleep.”

“I can’t sleep, I think it is years since I slept;” then presently she repeated, “where am I?”

“In John Bruce’s house, and I am John’s sister.”

“I thought so—Mrs. Crayton.”

“Exactly! so you know me?”

“But you have not been Mrs. Crayton all the time; why did you change so often? you were Mrs. Cox, and Finette—you were Martha, too.”

“Hush! you must not talk.”

For some little time Lil remained silent; but there was a troubled look in her eyes. Presently she whispered,—


“I must say something.”

“Very well, dear,” said Mrs. Crayton,

thinking it best to yield to the sick girl's fancy.

"I remember—I remember it all now! I have been trying a long time to remember, and it has come at last. I want you to know the truth; perhaps you would not be willing to keep me if you knew; I should not like to stay here on false pretences. I might go to the hospital, you know. People have said very dreadful things about me; there are women who think I am not worthy to touch the hand of their daughters. It is not true; I am not a bad girl, but when certain things are said about a woman, it seems to be almost as bad for her as though she were really guilty. I shall be easier now that you know."

She had said all this in little broken sentences, very slowly, very painfully, keeping her eyes fixed on Mrs. Crayton's



face. This lady was glad to be alone with her patient at that moment; she was not given to feminine weaknesses, and despised them as a general thing, but she felt a certain moisture in her eyes, as she tried to reassure Lil.

“You shan’t go to the hospital, you poor child. I believe nothing against you. Get well; that is all we ask of you.”

“Thank you. You are very good, and I am grateful, believe it. Now it seems to me that I could sleep.” And the long-wished-for unconsciousness did come to her. When the doctor saw her the next morning, he exclaimed, “I thought I could not be mistaken in my treatment; she is saved!”

John heard the news, and threw down his palette and brushes recklessly; his sister’s most imperious orders were im-

potent to restrain him. Lil looked at him without speaking; it was the first glance of recognition and intelligence he had seen from her. He bent down and whispered,—

“My darling!”

She did not answer; she only smiled faintly, and then closed her eyes once more.

CHAPTER XI.

A PLAIN WOMAN'S ROMANCE.


"Does Martha know?" asked Lil one day, when at last the power of continued thought had returned to her.

John reassured her. He had telegraphed immediately, saying that she was safe, though very ill. He had continued sending messages, with a reckless disregard of expense, since then, and had written also ; so that Martha had been able to follow all the phases of the illness, and now knew her sister to be out of danger. Lil kept her letters by her, long before she was

allowed to open them ; then, paragraph by paragraph, as strength came back, she read them. One of the first things she noticed was that, according to the date of the first one, and the post-mark on the envelope, it must have arrived at the bank several days before it was sent to her address. Doubtless the clerk had forgotten all about it, until the second arrived to remind him of his promise.


“ If I could have read it then, it would have given me courage ; I should not have felt so abandoned by all the world.”

Mr. Smith had brought her letters also, —those which being directed to the care of Mrs. Cox, had been sent on to Italy with that lady’s correspondence. He was exceedingly attentive to the invalid, but the sick-room awed him a little ; he did not know how to soften his gruff voice, or step



gently on tiptoe, for which he was more than once severely reprimanded by Mrs. Crayton. But if his visits were less frequent than those of John, he showed that it was not for want of thought; every day he went most diligently in search of wonderful fruits which at that season were worth almost their weight in gold, or flowers without odour, such as might be allowed to remain by her side. This was his principal occupation, and he pursued it with great diligence and intelligence. He seemed almost to have forgotten that he had asked Lil to be his wife. She had refused him; he had approved that refusal, even though at the time it had been hard to bear. Now that he had found her again, helpless and ill, his affection for her took a paternal character, which was not without its charm.

In Martha's letters there was a continued history of her life, descriptions of the millinery department at Small and Grove's; of her work, her doings and sayings. She spoke of the pleasure she felt when, at the end of the first week, the elder partner expressed his satisfaction with her services. "Oh, Lil! I was so beside myself with delight, that it was positive pain not to be able to show it. I just glanced at Dick—Mr. Kirkland, you know—who sat at his desk; but he never looked up: perhaps he thinks he has done enough for 'auld lang syne,' in procuring for me so good a place. Certainly I shall ask nothing more from him. But there are moments when one greatly wishes for a little sympathy, for a look which says, 'How pleased I am!' or 'How sorry!' It was absurd, but my spirits quite fell, and I went back to my




boarding-house almost down-hearted. You do not know what it is to live in a boarding-house. . .” Then, in the midst of her description of the long table, of the ill-assorted people whom fate, not choice, had thrown together, Martha left off abruptly, saying,—

“I have this instant received your despatch, my Lil. What has happened? It is terrible not to know; to feel that you are in trouble, in need of comfort, and to have to guess why this should be! Only two days ago I had a letter from you; in it you did not speak much about yourself, it is true, but everything seemed to be going on smoothly. Mrs. Cox, it appeared, was almost kind. You described parties, and evenings at the theatre which you had enjoyed. Oh, Lil! what is it? To think that I am powerless to help you! I must

find the money, of course, but where? I have nothing put by as yet, nothing of any value to sell; yet the money I must find. It shall be ready in time, never fear, my Lil. I must think it out quietly, when I am calmer. Just now I can but cry over your desolate loneliness. Fortunately, John Bruce is in Paris, and with him his sister, Mrs. Crayton. I am sure they would see that no harm came to you. You scarcely ever speak of John,—do you dislike him? You say you can wait three weeks; at the end of that time, you shall have the money.

“Mrs. Richards will advise me; she cannot herself help me, for she has just spent all her savings for Issy’s outfit. It was a singular parting between those two. I think Mrs. Richards, in spite of her theories, felt acutely her daughter’s ap-




parent indifference at leaving her home, and her delight at the prospect of beginning life for herself. Perhaps, on her side, Issy was waiting for some demonstration of affectionate regret from her mother; so they parted mutually embarrassed, and I am sure with an equal soreness at the heart."

Martha's next letter, the one containing the draft, was written nearly a week later:—

"I could not write during these past few days; I was too wretched. There appeared to be no hope, and what would have been the use of making you share all my miserable anxiety? I went to see Mrs. Richards, but my visit did not comfort me. I knew beforehand that she could not lend me the money; and there was a sort of 'I-told-you-so' air in her way of receiving the tidings, which irritated me. However,

she made out a list of rich people who might perhaps come to the rescue. There was no help for it; begging was my only chance. I scarcely felt the humiliation; I thought of you all the time. I saw your face, pale and anxious, and I begged boldly, but without success. First of all, in order to find time for my visits, I was forced to ask for a half-holiday, as I am usually busy from morning until evening. It was to one of the firm I had to apply. I asked for Mr. Grove; he was out;—for Mr. Small; he was too busy to see me. Finally, with a great choking in my throat, I had to make my request to Mr. Kirkland. He looked astonished, but when I assured him that the forewoman was quite able to replace me for a few hours, he granted my request. Then he said, with a grave smile,—



"You are very business-like, Miss Temple. Will you not forget for an instant that I am "a partner," and tell me as a friend, if there is anything I can do for you?"


"There is nothing," I said shortly. I was still hurt at the reserve he had so systematically maintained towards me in the presence of his seniors; unreasonably so, of course. He looked at me penetratingly, and said,—

"I should like to help you; I am sure that you are in trouble."

"I knew that if I attempted to speak, I should break down; so I merely shook my head, and hurried out. I will not dwell on my fruitless visits, my darling; it would only make you unhappy unnecessarily: it is all over now."

"In the evening I was too restless to

stay in my room ; and as to going into the common sitting-room, and listening to the gossip of my fellow-boarders, it was out of the question. So I went out, forgetting that I was tired, and wandered along the Lake shore. The days are getting much longer, and though it was past seven, there was still a dim light. As it was a fine evening people were walking along the Avenue ; I went on a little farther. At last I sat down on a big stone, and looked out at the beautiful water. There was something soothing in the constant, monotonous gurgle of the waves. The thought came to me, that for many centuries it had gurgled after the same fashion, while human miseries rose and fell, and were forgotten ; and that it would go with its eternal music, when ages had passed over us and our hopes and sorrows.



“‘Is there not room on the stone for two?’

“I looked up, startled. Mr. Kirkland was looking down at me. I silently moved a little on one side, and he sat down. Presently he said,—

“‘You ought not to go out so far alone.’

“‘Why so?’ I asked sharply. ‘Because weak woman should always be protected?’

“‘Exactly!’ Then, after a little silence, he continued, “I called at your boarding-house, but you had just gone out. I caught a glimpse of your figure on the Avenue, and I followed you. But what a walker you are! If my legs had been a little less long, I should have despaired of overtaking you.’

“I did not answer. I was busy making little holes in the sand with a stick. I

wanted dreadfully to cry, and you know that I do not cry easily.

“‘ You must tell me what it is ;’ and he took my hand—the hand with which I was working at my sand-holes. There was something of authority in his manner of doing this which I resented.

“‘ Why must I ? Is it a part of business compacts, that clerks and workpeople are to tell their secrets to their masters ? You should have warned me of that at the beginning.’

“‘ Have I offended you ? Have I in any way hurt your natural pride ? If so, it was most unintentionally, and I ask your pardon for it most heartily.’

“I looked up at him, and though it was now almost dark, I think he saw what was in my eyes. I no longer tried to take my hand away.

“‘I know it is not about yourself that you are worrying; it must be about your sister: she is in trouble?’

“‘I did not mean to tell him; but it broke from me almost against my will,—

“‘Yes; she has been abandoned, left in Paris quite unprotected, and without money to pay her passage back.’

“‘And you did not apply to me at once!’ he cried indignantly.

“‘I could not take money from you—no, not even for Lil; you have done enough—too much for me already. I cannot bear the weight of gratitude which you lay on my shoulders!’

“‘Why?’

“‘Because—’ I stopped; but then all I had dimly felt during the past weeks welled up in my heart, and I went on passionately, “‘Because once you seemed to

me a friend—my one friend ! and that now, you are—Mr. Kirkland.’

“ It was not what I had meant to say, and I felt myself grow crimson.

“ ‘Your one friend,’ he repeated slowly ; ‘yet you let me go without a word, when you knew that—’


“ ‘That what ?’ I asked, under my breath.

“ ‘That I loved you, and that my one ambition was to have you as my wife.’

“ ‘I did not know. How should I have known ? It seemed cruel of you to leave me in such uncertainty. I tried to forget you during all those years, and I could not.’

“ ‘What do you mean ? I wrote to you ; I spoke to your father.’

“ ‘I never received the letter. I never heard a word about you.’



“‘Martha!’

“I cannot tell how it happened, but when I knew what was going on, I was sobbing in his arms,—sobbing for joy. I never told you about it, Lil, but I had always loved him—him alone.

“‘And now will you let your husband help you?’”

“And so, Lil, it is your brother who sends you the money. We talked long that evening; he told me about his life, his hard work, the way in which, hearing nothing from me and knowing that we were living in greater luxury every year, he gradually began to work for work's sake, rather than from any hope of reaping his reward; that was how the American fever of fortune-making seized upon him. He told me very honestly that he had learned almost to forget me in the whirl; that,

however, when he saw me that rainy day, his old feelings had all come back with greater intensity than ever; he then vowed that I should be his wife; but he would not speak until he was sure of my own feelings towards him. I think the vow is likely to be realized.

“That, my Lil, is my one romance; it is the romance of a plain woman, who means to put all the poetry of which she is capable, in her daily life.

“Come back quickly, Lil,—come to your home! we will take such good care of you that you will forget all your past miseries.

“MARTHA.”



CHAPTER XII.

MRS. CRAYTON'S DECISION.

“WELL, that is odd ! Of the firm of Grove and Small—are you sure ?”

“Perfectly,” answered Lil smiling. She had just told Mrs. Crayton and Issy, who had come to pay her a visit, of Martha's engagement ; she was still weak, though fast recovering, and was stretched on a lounge by the fire.


“Well, that is odd !” again exclaimed Mrs. Crayton, dropping her work.

“Why do you think it is odd ?” inquired Lil.


“Because. . . . You know, my dear, women are too fond as a general thing of talking about their conquests; it is a weakness which I despise, still the coincidence is so singular, that I must tell you; if your sister is going to marry the junior partner, I, on the other hand, might have married the elder—I might indeed, at any moment, become Mrs. Grove,” and Mrs. Crayton dropped her voice confidentially.

“Then, why do you not?” asked Issy a little sharply; she would not have disliked seeing her good friend exercising her talent for governing, on a lawful husband.

“I have my reasons. Matrimony is all very well, and I consider it every woman’s duty to marry once—if she has a chance. Men are poor creatures—we can say it among ourselves—and need a deal of looking after; a man left to himself is but a



ship without a rudder. I, you know, have done my duty in that way, and marriage certainly has its unpleasant side: one is forced to see masculine weaknesses and faults with disagreeable clearness; matrimony holds a magnifying-glass, so to speak, before one's eyes. I do not deny that I was tempted by Mr. Grove's offer; he is very rich, and I should have been able to give my Archie advantages of education, which, with my present fortune, it would be difficult to give him. But there was my brother: if ever a man wanted looking after, it is he; such disorder in his affairs, such waste of money, and shirts in such a state! What can you expect of a young fellow who dreams about his painting three-quarters of his time, and is led here and there by men in velveteen jackets, and with unkempt beards, the rest of it! So I




sacrificed myself to him; it was my duty, and I did it!"

"But when he marries?" asked Issy, with her sharp eyes glancing from Mrs. Madge to Lil.

"I do not mean that he shall marry," answered Mrs. Crayton composedly; "if I sacrifice myself to him, it is but just that he should not make that sacrifice useless. He is not fit to marry."

Considering this as conclusive, she changed the conversation.

If Issy had expected to discover anything from Lil's countenance, she was disappointed. The invalid was still too weak to join much in the conversation, or even to follow it very attentively. She was in that state of convalescence when there is placid content in the absence of pain;



but when the brain is not yet fit for much thought.

While Mrs. Crayton and Issy continued their conversation, she gradually fell asleep.

Issy seeing this, presently said with her usual abruptness, "Mrs. Crayton, if you saw your husband's weaknesses through a magnifying-glass, you have not put on ordinary spectacles in order to see your brother's."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you think you can prevent his marrying, you are greatly mistaken; he means to marry her," and Issy with a little motion of her head designated Lil.

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible? On the contrary, everything makes it most possible. He was in love with her long ago; I might

have known it, when he haunted our house because she was there; but I was a little goose in those days, and I did not understand. I am not a goose now, and I see it all clearly enough."

Issy had at last discovered what it was that had so puzzled her; she did not want John Bruce to marry Lil.

"But she has been talked about!" stammered Mrs. Crayton.

"Tush! in the first place public opinion is with her now, and if it were against her, do you think that would prevent it?"

"But—it must not be!" exclaimed the lady vehemently.

Issy laughed a little, but she said no more; then seeing that Mrs. Crayton had fallen into a brown study, she amused herself by poking the fire with an appearance of unconcern; but in reality her eyes were

full of a strange trouble. Issy was a child no longer.

"You are of my opinion, I suppose," said Mrs. Crayton, looking sharply at the odd little figure; "you think that John ought not to marry."

"I think," said Issy, by no means taken off her guard, "that an artist should live for his art alone; or else marry under peculiar circumstances—not like everybody else."

Mrs. Crayton was on the point of asking what circumstances she meant, when the door opened and the servant called her out, for some culinary consultation.


"What do you mean by—like everybody else?" asked Lil; she had awakened just in time to hear the last part of the conversation.

"I mean," said Issy, looking at her re-

solutely, "that an artist is lost if he has to be bothered like other men, first with love-making, which interferes with his art; then with bread-making, which interferes with it still more. If, added to this, he has—suppose for a moment—to enter into his wife's womanish quarrels with the world in general, or persons in particular, or that he is tormented with jealousy, or what not—why, as a man he may still be well enough, but as an artist he will cease to exist. But, dear me, how late it is! and you are quite pale; I have tired you."

"But under what other circumstances can you imagine that an artist might marry?"

"I have not quite made up my mind. At any rate, it should be an artistic union without sentimental nonsense, you know, o talk of love—an union of talents and



aspirations, two beings working together, and looking upon work as the end and aim of their lives. Marrying, of course, but only because the world is so absurd as to see friendship between a man and a woman with suspicion."

"Is this not leap-year?" asked Lil.

"Is it? I do not know. I believe that when civilization is a little more advanced, women will not have to invoke any absurd privileges to claim their right to be frank and genuine. Good-bye, Lil; have you decided when you leave? it will be as soon as you are strong enough, I suppose; I shall have a quantity of things for you to take to them at home."

It was impossible, even with the best will in the world, to misunderstand Issy's words. Lil moved uneasily from side to side as though seeking for that rest, that unthink-

ing content, which she had found so delightful, and which now had left her, never to return. To be obliged to reason, to remember the past, to bring the experience which that past had given her to bear upon the present—all this in her state of extreme debility was very painful. The doctor found her once more feverish, and ordered absolute repose for a few days. This gave Lil an excellent excuse to herself, for putting off, as much as possible, all tormenting thoughts; she wanted to get well, first of all.

Fortunately, this getting well, in spite of a few such checks as the above, went on rapidly. At last the time came when she was allowed to drive out. Mr. Smith hired an easy carriage for her use; he did all such things with perfect simplicity as though it were his undoubted right to take care of

Lil, now that he had found her; and no one—she least of all—thought of remonstrating: he usually called her “My child,” and she quite naturally took the place which a daughter might have occupied; he seemed more and more satisfied that it should be so.

One sunny afternoon, Mr. Smith was unable to take his usual place by Lil's side for the daily drive, and John accompanied her. Archie Crayton was of the party, invited particularly by Lil, and as that young gentleman was her great friend and champion, he insisted on sitting close to her, and holding her hand all the time.

As to John, he would willingly have dispensed with his nephew's company; it seemed as though he never could see Lil alone a minute. Mrs. Crayton, in her quality of nurse, had an excellent pretext

for hovering about her patient at all times ; she did this indeed so persistently that Lil could not but notice it.

The young girl asked to go through some of the streets she had haunted in the days of her misery.

“ Shall we go through the Passage Laferrière ? ”

“ No, not there,” she said, shuddering ; “ sometimes in my dreams I see Madame Bonassieu, and I wake up in an agony of fear.”

“ But when I went to claim your trunk, and pay that tremendous sum you owed her, she vowed that she felt great affection for you, but that you had not responded to her gushing feelings, being cold, like all ‘ ces Anglaises. ’ ”

“ The dreadful woman ! See ! that is the shop where I offered my muff for sale.

While I was standing at the counter I saw you pass."

"Lil! and you did not call me! think what misery you might have saved yourself. Why did you not call me?"

"Because—I dared not."

"You dared not? Did you not know—could you not guess? . . ."

"Uncle John," called out Archie, who during this time had been watching with great interest, the clever way in which their coachman passed between two rows of carriages, "when you were a little boy, which did you most want to be—a painter or a coachman?"

"A coachman, I fancy. It's a fine thing to drive horses; if you promise to be a good boy, you may climb up by Pierre."

"Then Lil must go too."

"Ladies are not in the habit of sitting

by their coachmen; besides, there would be no place."

"Then I will stay here."

The insidious uncle's diplomacy not having succeeded, he continued the conversation over the child's head.

"Tell me why you feared to call me."


"Because—I feared you would misjudge me, and that I could not have endured. It would have been like the contempt of a dear brother," continued Lil more slowly.

John became very silent.

"Uncle John," again exclaimed Archie, who had continued his own train of thought since he last spoke, "if I marry Lil, what would she be to you?"

"My niece."

"Then you might as well call her your niece at once; I mean to marry her when I am a man."



"I should be a little old for you, Archie," said Lil, smiling.

"What does that matter, if I do not care! I say—which would you rather marry, a painter or a coachman?"

"A painter," and then suddenly she blushed.

"A painter—very well, then," he added, with a deep sigh of resignation; "I will be a painter." After a few minutes, he added abruptly, "Then if you were to marry her, Uncle John, what would she be to me?"

"Your aunt."

"Ah! but I'd rather marry her myself."

"I want to get out here," suddenly exclaimed Lil; they were passing the Pont Neuf. She emptied the contents of her purse into her hands, and was evidently dissatisfied with the result. "You must lend

me some more money," and she took out some pieces from his opened portemonnaie.

"May I go with you?" asked John, puzzled but submissive.

"No; Archie may come."

"Decidedly, I shall be jealous of that monkey!"

Lil had caught a glimpse of a beggar on the bridge—a beggar who had lost both legs; she went up to him rapidly. When she was close to him, she poured the coins—gold, silver, and copper—into his outstretched hands.


"It is the change for a penny you once gave to a poor girl, who was starving."

Then she turned away, shrinking nervously from his thanks and probable questions, before the beggar had sufficiently recovered from his amazement to speak.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE STUDIO.

LIKE most great workers John had been too much absorbed to notice the slight changes and small incidents, the apparently careless words, which are, in life, so much more important than they seem. He had been very happy during all this time; he had seen Lil's health daily improving, he watched with delight the returning colour, the brightness of the eyes; her sweet presence was becoming so necessary to him that he could not conceive of a life in which she should not be. He had never



told her in so many words that he loved her, indeed his sister had given him no opportunity to do so ; but his love seemed so natural a thing, so inevitable, that to put it into words, appeared to him almost superfluous. It never struck him that he was a strange sort of lover ; he went on with his work as usual ; early and late he was at his easel.

In the beginning, while Lil was ill, he had been violently disturbed, his love for her had been a torment as well as a joy ; now it was simply a joy, a serene joy. Sometimes, dreams of the future—that happy future, when she should be his wife, came to him, making his pulses beat wildly ; but then he would turn away, fearful of disturbing Lil's content. He did notice that she had grown a little serious, that the half child-like joyousness with which she

had at first welcomed returning health, was gone; but this was natural, he reasoned, and her sweet seriousness was but an added charm; the girl was changing to the woman; he was pleased that it should be so. Besides, John had been much taken up by professional success. He had exhibited in the "Salon," and his pictures had attracted much notice; the French critics, albeit not over given to acknowledge foreign talent, rendered justice to the earnest, honest painting, to the technical merit, and to the power of expression in his portraits; a second-class medal was awarded him, and his popularity—which till then had been principally a popularity of coterie—suddenly extended far and wide. The Paris correspondents to American papers, devoted many paragraphs to his success; orders came to him from influ-

ential American residents; a few foreigners, even, showed some disposition to avail themselves of his talent, an Italian princess with a fine name sent her "chasseur" to express her admiration, and to ask when he would be at liberty to receive her, as the Prince, her husband, desired to have a full-length portrait from his skilful brush.

But all this content of John's, disappeared after the drive with Lil. He became exceedingly impatient of the surveillance which his sister exercised over him, and hotly indignant at her unmistakable change of manner towards Lil. Mrs. Crayton behaved with more decorum towards her brother than she might otherwise have done, for success always commands a certain respect, but this respect did not extend so far as to make her contemplate John's possible

marriage with any degree of composure ; on that point, she meant to be inflexible. Certainly she could not complain of Lil, who was retiring and quiet, and who now spent much of her time in church ; but, in spite of this, she was learning to mistrust the young girl, and her one desire was to force her to go away, as soon as possible.

At last, the opportunity for which John had long waited, presented itself. One morning at table his sister said,—

“I am going out this afternoon with my friends, the Lesters, to do some shopping, Lil ; and I will at the same time get those things which I want you to take over for me.”

“I think, Madge, you had better find some other opportunity,” said John, looking up with a sudden change in his face.


"Lil will not be strong enough to travel for a long time yet."

"I am going in the 'Persia.' Mrs. Crayton's friends have kindly promised to take charge of me," said Lil very quietly, and then she turned to speak to Madge about her purchases.

When the morning meal was over, John said,—“I have no sitter this afternoon, Lil, it would be kind of you to finish reading me that article; I am much interested in it.”

He did not seem to think that she could possibly refuse, and did not even wait for an answer; she hesitated a moment, and then followed him to the painting-room.

But the interest in the article flagged both in the reader and the listener; the painting likewise did not progress as rapidly as usual. Lil's voice was not quite



steady, yet it was pleasant to hear, low-toned and sweet as it was. Madge came in and out in a fidgety and significant way; at last her friends called for her, and John breathed more freely. He interrupted Lil in the midst of a sentence as soon as his sister was well out of the way, threw aside his brushes, and sat down by her.

"What does all this mean, Lil? Why was I not told? Do you not think that I have some right to be consulted?"

"It was decided in a hurry last evening, when you were away."

"Whose suggestion was it?"

Lil hesitated a little, then she answered,—

"Your sister's, but—"

"I thought so."

"But," added Lil quickly, "I must go; I had decided beforehand that I should go

about this time; Martha wants me, she is to be married soon."

"The wedding is not to take place till September, and it is now only the end of May."

There was a short silence, then Lil said with some of her old passionate impetuosity,—

"John, I must go; my place is not here!"

"Your place not here? why where should it be?" She did not answer, and he went on. "Have I been dreaming all this time? have you not understood me, Lil? do you not know that I love you, that I have always loved you, from the very first time I saw you? that my one dream of happiness on earth—the one dream of the kind which has ever come to me, is to have you as my wife?"

"No, John, not that!" said Lil, turning very pale,—she tried to free her hands from his firm grasp, but she tried in vain,—
"not that; it can never be!"

"Why not? Ah! it is because I am plain and simple, because I have gone on quietly working, happy in your dear presence, yet not knowing how to put that happiness in words! But can you not understand that a love, which has lasted as mine has, through hopelessness itself, scarcely knows how to find words with which to express itself? I love you with my nature, such as it is; all its powers, all its aspirations are centred in you! Do not tremble, my own darling, I will not press my suit yet, if it is distasteful to you; I will be patient a little longer, hoping, trusting, that the day may come when you will learn to love me."

“You will not understand,” at last said poor Lil, wringing her hands.

“Understand what?”

“That I may not, that I dare not be your wife. At first, in the happy reaction from—from that dreadful time, and from my illness, I would not acknowledge this. I was so content in your care for me, it seemed so natural, so good a thing, that I wondered how it was that, long ago, I had not loved you as you deserved to be loved. I did understand you, John, and, foolishly, I thought that as your wife—some day—I might, by my life-long gratitude and tenderness, repay something of my debt to you—hush! let me finish; do not interrupt me. But that was mere foolishness—it was, perhaps, worse than foolishness; a few words from another showed me this, and though, at first, I would not understand it, yet slowly,



painfully, it came to me. Your wife, John, must be—what I am not;”—Lil hesitated, then went on bravely but with evident effort—“of stainless repute.”

“And who dares to suspect you?” He encircled her in his strong arms, as though he would defend her against the whole world.

“Many people, and not without some show of reason; I am innocent, and you know me to be so, John, but others—”

“What! you would throw away my happiness—your own, for this morbid fancy of yours? Never! Listen to me: we will leave this place, go far away, to Italy perhaps. I can paint there as well as here, and we will turn our backs on the narrow-minded, scandal-loving world. We shall be poor, perhaps—probably—but you will see, dear, that loving each other as we shall

do, all petty troubles will pass lightly over us. Besides, Lil, you greatly exaggerate things ; public opinion is with you, thanks to Mr. Smith's vigorous partisanship, and entirely against Mrs. Cox. Have not the very people who, in your need, turned their backs against you, sought you out, petted you, now that you have no need of them ?”

“The slightest thing would suffice to change that, once more. But that is not all ; I have yet something to say.”

John looked at her with sudden alarm, and said quickly, under his breath,—

“You still care for that man !”

“No,” cried out Lil as though she had been in pain. “No. But, John, I once did—it was my imagination more than my heart that was dazzled ; I know that now ; but yet my first dream of love was for him. I have been foolish, and must pay the penalty

of my folly. Hear me quietly, John, while I tell you what I have decided for my future ; I have thought it out well, soberly. I am going to enter a convent ; hush ! let me explain it all to you. During that terrible time, when I was alone and deserted, there were moments when I doubted of the goodness of God—almost of His very existence. I struggled against this, but feebly ; misery seemed to freeze me and make me hard. This was perhaps my greatest fault, one for which I must atone. Now, I have learned to pray again, and a nun's life is the only one to which I should aspire. I have written to the convent where I was educated, and the sisters are willing to receive me. I shall enter the novitiate immediately after Martha's marriage."

There was a short silence ; John sat with

his head averted. Then presently he said with quiet gravity,—

“I do not know much about convents, but I feel that you are making a great and pitiful mistake in fancying that God calls you to a monastic life. I once knew a young girl, who, suddenly, at nineteen, pretty, courted, admired, tenderly cared for by her family, determined to give up everything for the love of God. I saw her often at that time; she went about her daily duties like one in a dream; her eyes seemed full of mysterious sights invisible to others; in church, she was like one in a trance; it was ecstatic happiness to her, to be at the foot of the altar; elsewhere she was uneasy, troubled. She was so young that her parents implored her to wait a little while: she consented; but day by day she lost the fresh beauty of which those




who loved her were so proud; she grew thin and pale, and there were circles about her eyes: she was pining to death, and they unwillingly gave her up. That was a religious vocation, and before such I should bow resigned: do you feel what that young girl felt?"

"No," said Lil sadly, "my resolution has brought no joy to me, but I should not seek for it; I have lost my right to it, I think. Everything about me, John, is incomplete; my life is made up of beginnings, of incompleteness, like pages torn from several books, and which do not hang together well, making a puzzling, unsatisfactory problem; I think there are many such in the world; why should I prove an exception?"

"You are just now, Lil, in a morbid state of mind; you have distorted a few

careless words—or intentional words, let us say,—until you have allowed them to torment you unreasonably, and to warp your judgment. Take no step yet; I do not ask you to bind yourself to me by any promise, but you must, on your side, consent to contract no other engagement for six months. Go back to your sister as you propose; at the end of the six months I shall be in America, and will again say to you what I say now—be my wife. I believe in you, I honour you, I love you with all the fervour and strength of my being.”

Lil looked into the eyes of her lover; what she saw there made the quick blood spread over face and neck. An answer was trembling on her lips, when a loud knock at the studio door startled them both. John muttered something under his breath, but did not move; the knock was repeated,



then he rose impatiently to open the door.


"La Signora Principessa di Castel-della-rocca," announced a magnificent footman.

Lil rose hastily, but she had not time to leave the "atelier," for at that moment a well-known voice cried out,—

"Don't go, Lil dear, I am so delighted to see you once more!"

"Mrs. Cox!" exclaimed the young girl, shrinking away.

"No," said that superbly attired lady, with her clearest laugh, "not Mrs. Cox, but La Signora Principessa di Castel-della-rocca, as Pedro has it. You know, my love, I told you that when I exchanged my three-lettered name, it should be for a fine-sounding one. I have kept my word, have I not?"



CHAPTER XIV.

“VERY WELL, JOHN.”

Nothing could equal the supreme ease and grace with which this consummate actress said these words; with which she took possession of the studio, filling it, as it were, with her presence; with which she went up to Lil, and lightly kissed her on the forehead; with which, afterwards, she turned to John, bestowing on him her most dazzling smile, apparently quite unconscious of any coldness in her reception.

“My most sincere compliments, Mr. Bruce, on your success; I always knew

that you were destined to become a great painter, but really your progress within the last year is something surprising,” and she looked at the unfinished picture on the easel, through her eye-glass, with an affectation of critical admiration, which was perhaps a trifle overdone.

“The Prince is delighted with your works, especially with the portrait of the lady in red; he is still hesitating as to whether he will have me painted by Gordigiani or by you—of course I shall help him to make up his mind on the subject. You must make me handsome and young—flatter me outrageously; indeed, you must make me look queen-like,” and she drew herself up to the full extent of her superb height; then, she good-naturedly laughed at herself.

“I fear, Princess,” at last said John,



with perfect politeness, and only just the slightest possible curl of his lip, "that I shall scarcely have time to undertake so important a work ; I have several portraits to finish yet, and I expect to sail for America before long."

"My dear Mr. Bruce," said the lady, "an artist always finds time to paint a Princess, especially when he knows that it may be the making of his fortune. Lil here, who evidently feels a great and natural interest in your future prosperity, will, I am sure, advise you to find the time necessary."


"You are mistaken ; I would give him no such advice."

The Princess quietly turned towards Lil, who was pale and whose eyes were full of indignant fire, and calmly surveyed her.

"My dear child, you never were reason-

able ; you always allowed the passion of the moment to obscure your judgment ; that is the secret of all your past troubles ; do you not see that your anger against me is most ill-advised ? If I have come here to-day it was not, as you perfectly understand, simply to compliment Mr. Bruce on his success ; it was to see you also, to make you understand that, if I am in need of you, you are still more in need of me. If, thanks to Mr. Smith's officiousness, people look coldly and suspiciously on me, so that even my change of name and position does not entirely shield me from impertinence—you must understand that, in spite of the change of public opinion in your favour, certain parts of your story still remain obscure. In this pass we can be of use to each other ; there has been a misunderstanding, a fatal combination of circumstances—nothing more !


I was deceived by a maid, jealous of your position, who furthermore stole the money destined for you ; all very sad, no doubt, but it is all over now, and things are fortunately soon forgotten in this world ! Leigh Ward pursued me in Italy, he insisted upon seeing me, I refused to admit him ; he came again, I was again denied to him ; finally he waylaid me, and told me everything,—his proposal of a secret marriage, your refusal, his fruitless pursuit of you ; everything, in short. It was impossible not to believe him. All this might be made of great use to you, dear, but to make it of use, we must work together ; we must be seen in each other's company—as friends—mutually absolving each other, in the eyes of the world. By the way, do you know what has happened to poor Leigh ? the prick of the pin in the



air-balloon, nothing more nor less! His uncle has died, leaving him just enough not to starve. What will he do for straw-coloured gloves now? I am curious to see what will become of him. He used to say that he would blow his brains out—what he had of them—if such a thing ever happened; but he has not done so yet, and there is an end to that sort of thing when it is put off. Perhaps he will dwindle down to shabby gentility, and music-teaching at a dollar a lesson, or else, if he can find a purchaser for his fine eyes, he will marry money—there was an heiress with a squint, and some thirty-two summers behind her, who was much taken with him. At any rate, he is a finished man,—collapsed like the balloon. . . . Well, Lil! what do you think of our league, offensive and defensive?”

“How can you expect me to forget in a minute the misery, the terror, the desolation which I suffered through you!” exclaimed Lil.

“I do not expect you to forget it; you impulsive people never will see things as they really are. You must understand that the state of your feelings is a matter of complete indifference to me. Hate me as much as you will, but bring what common-sense you have to bear on the question; we can be of use to each other, it would be stupidity to allow animosity to interfere with our personal advantage. All I ask of you, is to be seen once in public with me, and not to look like a tragedy queen when I remark that the day is fine. I am to have a great many people to dinner on Tuesday; you and Mr. Bruce might come.”




“Oh, no—no!” cried Lil as she thought of another dinner, during which she had been very unhappy.

“Very well,” said this woman of the world cheerfully—she was not easily disconcerted, “if that seems too dreadful, which, by-the-bye, is not flattering,—I will call for you next Sunday afternoon; there are to be races, the finest of the year; all Paris, particularly foreign Paris, will be there, and you can be seen without having the trouble of talking to people and making yourself agreeable.”

Lil was very averse to this plan also, but she listened quietly to the Princess, who volubly repeated her reasons for insisting. John remained quite silent during the whole of the discussion; finally he looked up, and Lil sought in that look for counsel and direction.

“Very well; I will go with you,” she said presently.

Sunday came and at last passed away. The trial was made as light to the young girl as possible. The Prince was courteous and attentive to her, his wife was sweetness personified; before long Lil was sufficiently mistress of herself to observe the successful man; he was evidently old, but so well got up, so straightened by artificial means, so dyed, so smoothed down, that it was impossible to assign him any definite age. Perhaps had Mrs. Cox not been hurried into matrimony by Mr. Smith's energetic measures against her, she would scarcely have chosen the Principe di Castel-della-rocca as her lord and master; all his courtesy could not quite disguise the violence of his temper, the pettiness of his mind or his preposterous jealousy. Lil, on one occasion



when the Prince indulged in a violent fit of anger against an awkward servant, surprised his loving bride watching his empurpled face with calm calculation; in her cold eyes the hope of a second widowhood seemed to be lurking.

“Good-bye,” said Lil significantly, as at last the long afternoon came to a close.

“Good-bye, dear,” said the Princess, with her most icy smile; “we are scarcely likely to meet often. Still, do let me know when you intend to become Mrs. John Bruce, I should like to send you a wedding present. By the way, I am very sorry, but the Prince is most decidedly in favour of Gordigiani—these Italians hang together so; well, good-bye!”

During all this time John forbore to press his suit, but his manner towards Lil made his intentions very evident, even to those

who did not wish to see or understand them. Mrs. Crayton had always stoutly asserted and half believed that her brother would not—could not be so absurd as to want to marry Lil, since she, his sister, was willing to sacrifice herself to his welfare, to keep his house, to see to his linen, etc. But when it became evident that he did want something more than sisterly devotion, Madge showed her disapprobation of the whole affair by disagreeable little speeches, and a coldness of manner which distressed Lil greatly. After one of these little scenes, John said with something like hardness in his voice,—

“Madge, this sort of thing must not be repeated.”

“What sort of thing?” asked Madge defiantly, armed for battle.

“Your unkind behaviour to Miss Tem-

ple. As long as she was ill, you were goodness itself to her, and for that I am truly grateful; but evidently it is only prostrate humanity that you consider as worthy of your care. It is my wish that Lil should be treated now, as before, with gentleness and tenderness; she is as much in need of them as ever."

"A fine thing, indeed, that I should receive lessons from you! the girl is well enough treated, too well indeed. One would suppose that to you she is the centre of the universe."

"One would not be far wrong."

"What! do you mean to say you would be such a—"


"I mean to say, Madge, that I have asked Miss Temple to be my wife; my one fear is, that she may refuse me that great happiness."

“ And that is how you show your appreciation of my sacrifice,—of my refusing to marry again.”

“ That was a mistake, which I advise you to rectify as soon as possible, my dear sister. You know, I am a great advocate of marriage.”

Mrs. Crayton looked at her brother with open eyes ; he was appearing to her in a new character. Finding no other answer to his suggestion, she burst into violent and hysterical weeping. John, it is sad to relate, turned in a most cowardly manner, and fled. Almost as soon as he was well out of hearing, practical Madge wiped her eyes, and began a letter to her middle-aged admirer, and then in the midst of her epistolary effort, fell to thinking about the colour of her wedding-dress.

When Issy called that day, she took a



vicious pleasure in speaking of her brother's probable marriage, to which, after due consideration, she had consented, even though the thought of it had at first, she owned, been distasteful to her.

When Issy next saw the brother and sister, it was to take leave of them; she had made up her mind to go with some friends to Italy, and her hair, which she had before allowed to grow to a reasonable length, was again severely cropped. John remarked this, and laughingly said that, if Samson's bodily strength was in proportion to the length of his hair, her strength of mind was in direct ratio with—the shortness of hers.

“I wish I did belong to the short-haired sex; it is dreadful to be a woman.”

She said this almost savagely, yet there was a slight tremor in her voice as she

uttered the last words, which greatly puzzled John : there were certain occasions when this young man was singularly dull of comprehension.

The day fixed for Lil's departure was rapidly approaching ; one morning she said to John,—

“ I want you to do something for me.”

“ With all my heart.”

“ I cannot leave Paris without seeing Finette.”

John knew all about Finette ; he had heard Lil tell the story more than once : he remained silent a few moments, then he said gently,—

“ No ! you cannot see Finette ; that is, if you will be guided by my advice.”

“ She was the only being who was kind to me during that dreadful time ! why

should I be ungrateful—why should I ask who and what she is ?”

“I do not wish you to be ungrateful towards her ; but, believe me, the meeting would be embarrassing, quite as much to her as to you. Let me go with you to the Passage Laferrière, there we shall learn something about her, and perhaps find out some way of being useful to her.”

Lil shrank a little from the idea of re-visiting the scene of so much misery, but she consented.


They walked to the house almost in silence. Madame Bonassieu at first looked at Lil in stupified amazement, then poured forth a volley of exclamations, welcomes, and questions.

John, seeing the troubled look on the young girl's face, took the conversation entirely on himself.

"I wish to know what has become of Mademoiselle Finette."

"Bon Dieu! as though I occupied myself with such people! She has her ups-and-downs I suppose, like the rest, and now she's down; she has come back to the refuge, but good-hearted as I am, there is a limit even to my patience. Months and months she owes to me, monsieur, and I, a poor widow with a daughter to bring up! so I told her that she must pay or decamp—it is true, my Céleste is fond of her, and so am I for that matter, but you understand—"

"I think," said John, "that we can arrange matters. I will draw out a paper, a regular receipt for what Mademoiselle Finette owes you, and for a year's rent in advance; this I wish to pay. Of course we must have proper witnesses, so that everything may be regular."



Madame Bonassieu for once in her life had no exclamation ready ; two neighbours, whom Lil knew to be friendly to Finette, were brought in as witnesses, and the whole affair was concluded.

“Would there be any way of getting into Mademoiselle Finette’s room ?” asked John, to whom Lil had whispered a request.

“Bless you ! the careless girl scarcely ever locks her door ; it is true, she has nothing that would be worth stealing.”

Lil was fast recovering her spirits and energy : she and John were very busy for the next hour, bringing in big bunches of flowers, decorating the poor room, making it gay, and spreading a little feast on the table.

“I remember her passion for sardines,” said Lil, as she placed a box of those delicacies among the pâtés, the fruits, the


cakes and bonbons. She wrote a few words of affectionate farewell on the back of a photograph, which she had had taken on purpose, and which she placed so that Finette should see it as she entered.

Then, when all was done, a great trouble came into her eyes, and she sat down wearily.

“What is it?” asked John.

She did not answer at once, then she said,—

“You do not know what it is that you ask. Do you not see, that I cannot be your wife? Do you not understand that I have passed through trials which leave their mark? that I have been brought close to shame and sin, made to comprehend many things of which I was very ignorant, and of which I ought to have remained in ignorance; that my one friend



—the only being who was good to me—is a poor creature whom you yourself decided I should not see again? Oh, John! leave me to do what I had resolved on. A life of prayer and sacrifice is the only one to which I should aspire.”

She was trembling, and the colour rose and fell in her cheeks. John took both her hands in his, saying,—

“Lil, do you know the story of Una and the lion? It is yours—yours, my spotless Lily.” She looked up at him, with immense gratitude in her sweet eyes. “You are still unable to judge quietly of these things, my darling; the shock was too great, and is still too recent. When you are really yourself once more, you will feel that God wishes for no unwilling sacrifice, and that yours would be an unwilling one. Your life may still be a blessed one for

yourself and for me ; happiness is a great magician. I do not ask for an answer now ; you must have more time. I shall be in the United States before long—in September, for your sister's wedding. I will go to you ; and then—then, dearest, you shall give me your answer.”

Lil looked up at him, and then, once more her eyes fell.

“ Very well, John,” she said.

THE END.

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